

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

Sight & Sound

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UNEARTHLY STRANGER: SCARLETT JOHANSSON IN

UNDER THE SKIN

MADE IN BRITAIN SPECIAL

- RICHARD AYOADE ON 'THE DOUBLE' • DAVID MACKENZIE'S 'STARRED UP'
- 'A STORY OF CHILDREN AND FILM' • THE S&S INTERVIEW: JEREMY THOMAS

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38 Me, myself and him

A man is haunted by his doppelganger in Richard Ayoade's *Submarine* follow-up, *The Double*, a black comedy of anxiety and paranoia, loosely adapted from Dostoevsky's novella. By **David Thompson**

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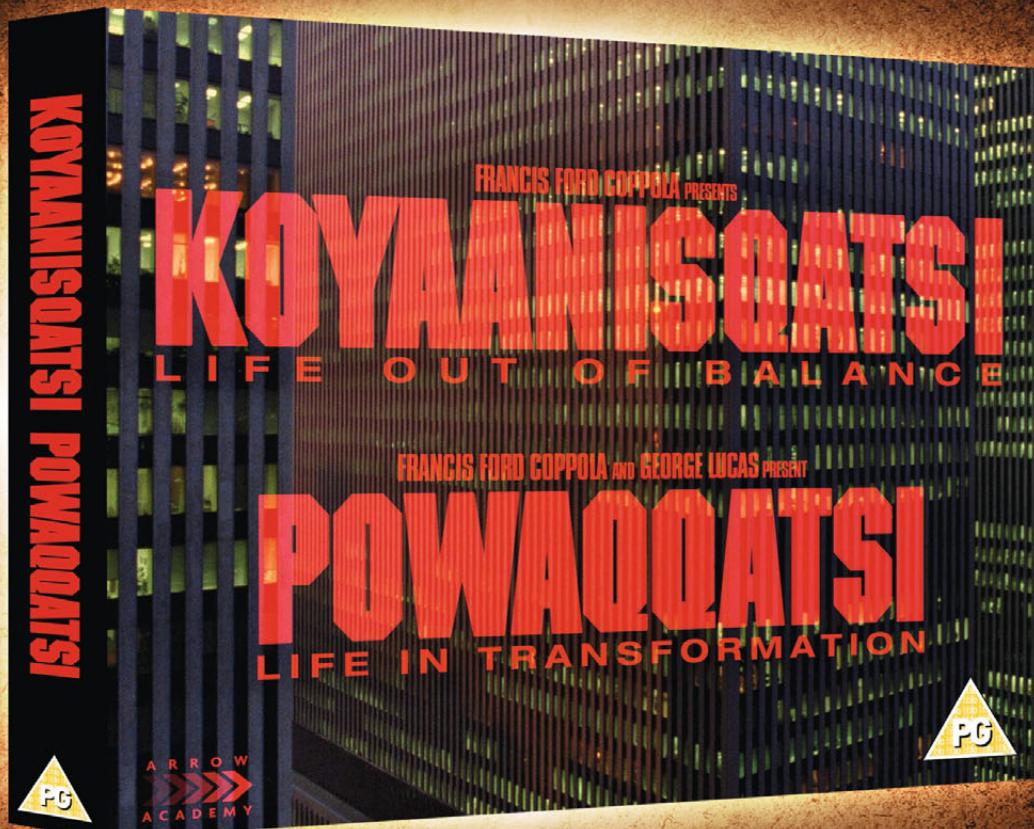
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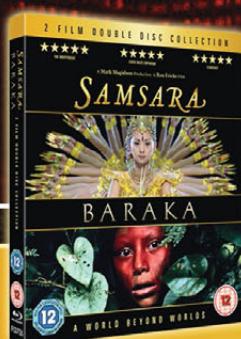
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Editorial Nick James



MADE IN BRITAIN

As you flick through this issue, with its cover blazoned with Scarlett Johansson in Jonathan Glazer's extraordinary *Under the Skin*, you will notice that we've stamped 'Made In Britain' on many of the features. What you won't find, however, is a manifesto or a particular debate around British cinema – except in this column, that is, and even here I want to be sceptical about the usefulness at this time of an overview. So this 'British Special Issue' collects articles about British cinema simply because this happens to be a pretty strong time aesthetically for UK national cinema – a good enough reason, I suggest.

Having lived through the long era of antagonism between the populist and indie tendencies in British cinema – what might once have been characterised, crudely, as the Alan Parker/Ridley Scott-in-Hollywood approach versus the Peter Greenaway/Derek Jarman experimental tendency – it seems to me that what really sings about British cinema at the moment is how inclusive it is. Extremes can still be identified: Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity* at the bigger budget, populist end and, at the more special interest end, examples as various as Ben Wheatley's hallucinogenic *A Field In England*, Steven Knight's one-man-in-a-car drama *Locke*, and Joanna Hogg's study of a pair of artists *Exhibition* (the last two are due out later this year). What's heartening is that there is aesthetic risk-taking at both ends, and the films in between are just as richly various. Those we've featured this month – *Under the Skin* (page 22), David Mackenzie's *Starred Up* (page 28) and Richard Ayoade's *The Double* (page 38) – attest to that.

What's still hotly contested, however, is precisely what constitutes a British film. Complaints showered in when *Gravity* won Best British Film at the Baftas because it was made by a Mexican director with two American stars, Sandra Bullock and George Clooney. Yet Cuarón has lived in London for more than a decade, the film was shot here and its innovations were the work of technicians in this country. More category tremors were felt when David Cameron referred to *12 Years a Slave* as a British film when it had never tried to qualify as such, even though it has a British director in Steve McQueen and strong British support in the cast, including Chiwetel Ejiofor and Benedict Cumberbatch. Another irony arose when the winner of the Bifa for Best British Film, *Metro Manila*, was nominated for the Bafta for Best Film Not in the English Language. And

Shouldn't there be films defending the NHS against what is arguably a process of privatisation? Shouldn't filmmakers have something to say about the gulf between rich and poor?



for me there has to be something faulty with the British awards and categories if a film as strong and important in terms of seeing Britain today as Clio Barnard's *The Selfish Giant* doesn't get major awards recognition.

All of these mild conundrums, however, are merely symptoms of the UK's newly enjoyed centrality to film culture as both preferred hub for Hollywood-level blockbusters and a place where lower-budget films of all kinds are thriving. That times have changed, and that the confusion of plenitude is being embraced, can be seen in coinciding events. Alongside Best British Film for *Gravity*, Bafta gave the award for 'outstanding British contribution to cinema' to Greenaway, while the 20th anniversary of Jarman's death has been lavishly commemorated. No doubt the Scotts, Adrian Lyne and Alan Parker will get their own moments of historical refocus in the near future – even if Ridley Scott's *The Counsellor* represents an unaccustomed low point for that once dominant variety of large-canvas filmmaking.

So what's missing? Thinking about the success in Berlin of Yann Demange's Northern Ireland Troubles thriller '71 and the innovative Nick Cave biopic documentary *20,000 Days on Earth* (see pages 18-21), and hoping to see Mike Leigh's *Mr. Turner* – about the beloved artist J.M.W. Turner – and Ken Loach's portrait of an Irish socialist, *Jimmy's Hall*, in Cannes, it's that last film that gives the clue. Loach has said it will be his last drama feature film. Only a handful of the films I've celebrated here are about live, contemporary issues. I'm the last person to complain if British cinema has kicked its once heavy dependence on social realism, but that doesn't mean I want it to die out. Shouldn't there be films defending the NHS against what is arguably a process of privatisation? Shouldn't filmmakers have something to say about the ever-widening gulf between rich and poor? In that sense film seems as self-censoring and scared of offence as the rest of contemporary media. What's needed is a Ken Loach or a Lindsay Anderson from a younger generation – a filmmaker who will, of course, be nothing like Loach or Anderson. We'll know she's here when the politicians look intimidated and start to bellyache about the cinema. **S**

IN THE FRAME

FLARE PATH



Riot grrrl: Kathleen Hanna, subject of *The Punk Singer*

ON OUR
RADAR

Studio Ghibli

In April and May the BFI Southbank, London celebrates the release of Miyazaki Hayao's swansong 'The Wind Rises' (right) with a complete Ghibli retrospective. Expect all the Miyazaki classics alongside other Ghibli fantasists, including co-founder Takahata Isao.



In recognition of the increasing complexity of sexual politics, the renamed BFI Flare: London LGBT Film Festival aims for inclusivity

By Ben Walters

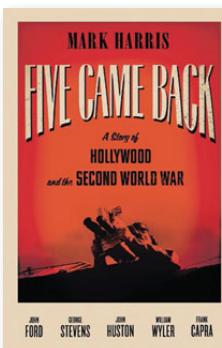
What's in a name? In 2013, the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival set about canvassing opinion on whether it should change its title. The event launched in 1986 as Gay's Own Pictures, promptly added 'lesbian' and adopted its current formulation, and has remained the same ever since. Meanwhile, LGBT has become the standard term in public discourse around issues of sexuality: B is for bisexual and T for transgender. Many now add Q for queer or questioning and I for intersex; some also use C for curious or celibate, A for asexual, P for polyamorous and K for kink. It's an increasingly broad church.

The festival has responded to these shifting realities with a new identity, announced in February, as BFI Flare: London LGBT Film Festival. Whether LGBT will prove better than 'lesbian and gay' at covering the diversity of experiences showcased remains to be seen – the opinion-canvassing process apparently made clear that the catch-all term 'queer' was actively opposed by a significant proportion of the festival's constituents. Meanwhile, the word 'flare', according to BFI head of cinemas and festivals Clare Stewart, "has a conceptual richness suggesting the light of a cinema projector or a beacon and the spark of an idea, moving forward and growing outward".

Like the London Film Festival, Flare is divided into conceptual sections, in this case 'Hearts' (about love, romance and friendship), 'Bodies' (sex, identity and transformation), and 'Minds' (art, politics and community). The boundary between the first two seems porous: *Will You Dance with Me?*, a premiere showcasing footage filmed by Derek Jarman at a 1984 nightclub event, is in the former; *Gerontophilia*, Bruce LaBruce's intergenerational odd-couple escapade, is in the latter. 'Minds' contains more documentaries, including portraits of 'gender outlaw' Kate Bornstein (*Kate Bornstein is a Queer & Pleasant Danger*) and riot grrrl icon Kathleen Hanna (*The Punk Singer*).

Five Came Back

Mark Harris's fascinating book (right) focuses on the five most influential American directors to serve in World War II – John Ford, Frank Capra, William Wyler, John Huston and George Stevens – and details their experiences filming the war for American audiences, from the fall of Paris to the liberation of the concentration camps.





Tuesday's child: Tilda Cobham-Hervey in *52 Tuesdays*

The festival opens and closes with Sundance prize-winning titles about difficult, even traumatic processes of change. British feature *Lilting*, directed by Hong Khaou, has Ben Whishaw as a young man mourning his lover by trying to connect with the latter's prickly mother (Cheng Pei Pei); the closing film, Australian director Sophie Hyde's *52 Tuesdays*, follows the shifting relationship over a year between a teenager (Tilda Cobham-Hervey) and her mother (Del Herbert-Jane) as the latter transitions from Jane to James.

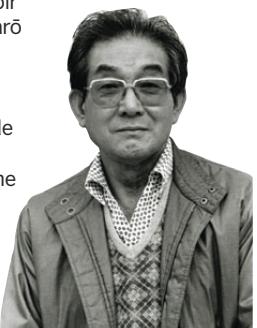
In between, this inaugural Flare has a handful of hard-hitting documentaries. Micah Fink's *The Abominable Crime* focuses on homophobia in Jamaica, where the Offenses Against the Person law has arguably enabled violence; that screens with Habeeb Lawal's short *Veil of Silence*, about Nigeria's recent law against same-sex marriage. *Born This Way* looks at LGBT life in Cameroon, where homosexuality is illegal, and Marta Cunningham's *Valentine Road* examines the case of gay Californian high-school student Larry King, murdered by a classmate. A round-table discussion, 'The Abominable Laws', gives these disturbing subjects context.

Such films are the most sobering aspect of a festival that always contains more than its share of (often campy) fun and games. But some of this year's larkier inclusions could be read as deflected expressions of anxiety. A Queer Bollywood strand offers, as well as melodrama and bling, engagement with a culture whose relationship with LGBT issues has recently grown unexpectedly fraught. At the launch event the warmest,uzziest reception was for 'We Love Caged Lesbians', a talk to be accompanied by a screening of the 1949 women-in-prison feature *Caged* and a themed after-party; and for 'Scream Queens: Gay Boys and the Horror Film', a talk on horror's hidden queer history, programmed alongside four 80s titles where the red comes with a dash of pink, including *The Lost Boys* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street Part II: Freddy's Revenge*. Fun – but also reminders that threats of incarceration and violence are subjects with significant purchase in the LGBT imagination right now – and that flares are not just spectacular displays but calls to action. ☀

i BFI Flare: London LGBT Film Festival runs at BFI Southbank from 20 to 30 March

Bradford Film Festival

A tribute to Japanese noir pioneer Nomura Yoshitarō (right) is just one of three retrospectives at this year's festival (27 March-6 April), alongside Sally Potter and James Benning. Nomura's crime thrillers, including the detective mystery 'The Castle of Sand', will travel to London's ICA later in April.



Chris Marker

The essay filmmaker and polymath's first UK museum retrospective (Whitechapel gallery, London, 16 April-22 June) showcases his films – including a rare version of 'La Jetée' (below) with an alternative opening scene – photography, multimedia installations and lesser-known works such as travel books. An accompanying film programme runs at London's Barbican and Ciné Lumière.



ANATOMY OF A MOVIE THE LEGO MOVIE



25% *The Matrix* (1999)

15% *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-03)

12% *The Truman Show* (1998)

12% *Time Bandits* (1981)

10% *A Town Called Panic* (2000)

10% *Toy Story* (1995)

8% *Wreck-It Ralph* (2012)

5% *The Brady Bunch Movie* (1995)

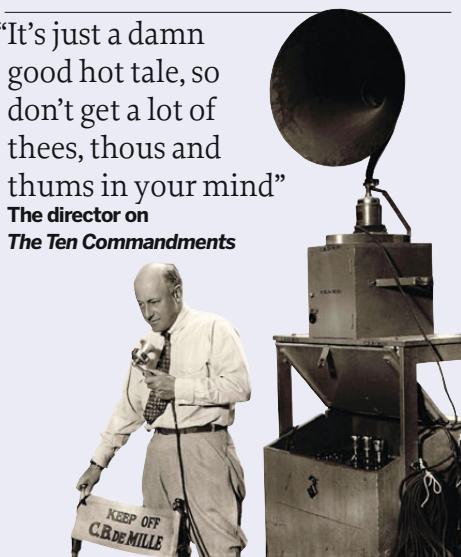
2% *WALL-E* (2008)

1% *The Gold Diggers of 1933* (1933)

QUOTE OF THE MONTH CECIL B. DEMILLE

"It's just a damn good hot tale, so don't get a lot of thees, thous and thums in your mind"

The director on
The Ten Commandments



Flatpack Film Festival

The first UK screening of restored hand-tinted shorts conceived for the 1900 Paris Exposition is a highlight of this cine takeover of Birmingham (20-30 March). Use the festival's specially designed map of the city, discover Henry Hill's experimental films and Bill Morrison's found-footage creations (see page 51), and explore how cinema works its magic on the brain.



CHAIN REACTION

The anklet worn by Barbara Stanwyck in *Double Indemnity* signifies enslavement, eroticism and danger



By Hannah McGill

When Walter Neff first meets Phyllis Dietrichson, during a visit to her home seeking to renew her husband's car insurance, he's struck by a few things: her ripostes to his forthright flirtation, deadpan but somehow not discouraging; the perfume she wears, which seems to spread the scent of honeysuckle all the way down the street; and the "honey of an anklet" that winks at him from just above her high-heeled slipper. The anklet preoccupies him. He asks her what's engraved on it – the answer conveniently putting them on first-name terms – and then enquires whether she'll still be wearing it when he returns to see her husband. Later on, he's still thinking about the way it "cut into her leg". Why does the anklet, in particular, carry such an erotic charge for Walter? Why does Phyllis wear her own name around her leg – and tightly enough to suggest cutting into the flesh?

An ankle bracelet would have been an unusual but not unknown adornment when *Double Indemnity* came out in 1944. Numerous Hollywood stars of the time, from smiley Forces sweetheart Betty Grable to the more flashy and exotic Ava Gardner and, earlier, the unambiguously sexual Jean Harlow, were pictured wearing them – although that, of course, does not preclude their being seen as somewhat flashy for an ordinary woman.

For Marilyn Monroe, who took to wearing one in the late 40s, the association was with commitment, or the lack thereof; a 1960 quote about her "slave bracelet" has her saying, "I bought it myself... I wore it because I didn't belong to anyone although I longed to." Being primarily associated with Asian and Middle Eastern women, ankle jewellery carried a heady whiff of the eroticised racial Other: the harem girl, the belly dancer, the veiled seductress – all fetishised archetypes then as now. Monroe's use of the term "slave bracelet" also calls to mind the Victorian euphemism "white slavery" for forced prostitution or the sexual corruption of white women by other races, still a source of moral panic in the 1940s. Ankle bracelets retain the vague hint of trashiness, linked to the suspicion that they might be secret sexual signifiers. Does one mean that its wearer is a lesbian? A prostitute? Available? Strictly unavailable? Up for adultery? The internet entertains all these possibilities, and offers no clarity – so presumably anyone attempting to use an anklet as sexual advertising meets with an uncertain response from her public.

The suggestions of licentiousness, sadism and ownership stirred up by the anklet in *Double Indemnity* instantly establish the unwholesomeness of the attraction between Walter and Phyllis, and the sense of her as



Dangerous liaison: Fred MacMurray falls feet first for Barbara Stanwyck in *Double Indemnity*



Sexual siren: Jean Harlow sporting an anklet

a dangerous woman. Like the stereotypical female 'tease', Phyllis's anklet telegraphs both availability and unavailability. Phyllis is owned, bought, chained to her husband – but she's also conspicuously drawing attention to her legs, and to the sexy shoes she apparently wears on her own around the house during the day. The decoration around her leg, and the association Walter immediately makes with painful cutting, also prefigure elements of their coming crime: the broken leg that will befall Mr Dietrichson, and the fact that the cast he must wear becomes crucial to Phyllis and Walter's murder plot. And ultimately, Phyllis wears a chain on her leg because she is a criminal – already, when Walter meets her, guilty of at least one murder. Indeed, to a current American audience, the words 'ankle bracelet' are more likely to conjure up an electronic monitor worn by a prisoner under house arrest than a piece of jewellery. A further grisly association, given that Phyllis has her name engraved on the anklet, is with tagged toes in mortuaries: as if she knows deep down that femme fatales don't make old bones, Phyllis is making herself that little bit easier to identify down the line.

FICTIONAL EUROPEAN STATES

Whether out of political expediency or for satirical effect, filmmakers have always enjoyed overseeing the birth of a nation



that only rich people know about, but film directors have always offered their audiences the opportunity to travel to imaginary (and often hidden) parts of the continent. Wes Anderson's Republic of Zubrowka, home to the lavish Grand Budapest Hotel (pictured above), is just the latest example of a filmmaker playing with Europe's geography.

By Isabel Stevens

30 Rock's Jack Donaghys may joke with Jerry Seinfeld about holidaying in Svenborgia and Grenyarnia, secret European countries



1 Flausenthurm (The Smiling Lieutenant)

Ernst Lubitsch, who often transported audiences to fictitious lands, went one step further in this racy 1931 musical and penetrated the fragile national psyche of an overlooked and oft-misspelt micro-nation. One accidental smile from Maurice Chevalier at Miriam Hopkins's princess and outrage and comedy ensue.



2 Freedonia (Duck Soup)

Is there a more absurd, outrageous creation than the Marx brothers' Freedonia? "If you think this country's bad, just wait till I get through with it," sings Groucho Marx's President Firefly. Released in 1933, the year Hitler took power, this satire not only lampoons dictators (Mussolini banned it in Italy) but government of all kinds.



3 Tomainia (The Great Dictator)

Watching Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* inspired a horrified Charlie Chaplin to create Tomainian tyrant Adenoid Hynkel. An imaginary setting was not just a handy ploy for getting laughs in his 1940 spoof, but a necessity given that when the film went into production America and Britain were trying to avert a war.



4 Gudavia (The Gamma People)

Fictional states aren't just the preserve of comedy, and proved rather useful for preying on Cold War fears, as demonstrated in John Gielgud's 1956 sci-fi tale about two newspapermen stranded in an Eastern-bloc-like village ruled by a mad scientist-dictator who experiments on young Gudavians with gamma rays.



5 Grand Fenwick (The Mouse that Roared)

In Jack Arnold's delicious 1959 satire about the Marshall Plan, the only export of this tiny nation – Pinot wine – is threatened by a US rival. The response from Peter Sellars's Prime Minister Mountjoy: "We declare war on Monday, are defeated on Tuesday and by Friday we will be rehabilitated beyond our wildest dreams."

Ankle jewellery carried a heady whiff of the eroticised racial Other: the harem girl, the belly dancer, the veiled seductress

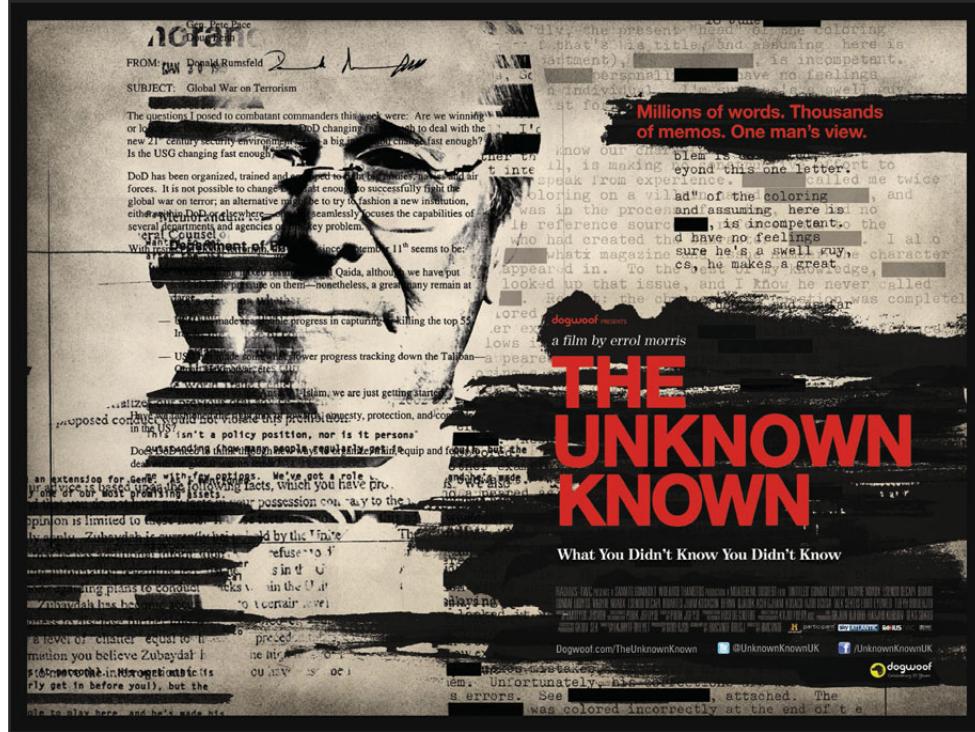
Phyllis's anklet does not feature in the source novella by James M. Cain, first published in serial form in 1936. It was an invention of co-screenwriters Raymond Chandler and Billy Wilder, the latter referring to it as "the equipment of a woman, you know, that is married to this kind of man". This equipment was important enough to Wilder that he had Barbara Stanwyck play Phyllis in a blonde wig "to complement her anklet". A character's whole look built around a tiny scrap of jewellery: clearly it's not just to Walter that the anklet has peculiar weight. The "honey of an anklet" is Walter's warning of a honey trap. It adorns a woman who has enslaved herself through avarice and self-interest, and who is out to enslave him too – while its engraving warns him that whoever she might seduce, Phyllis will always be her own true love. **S**



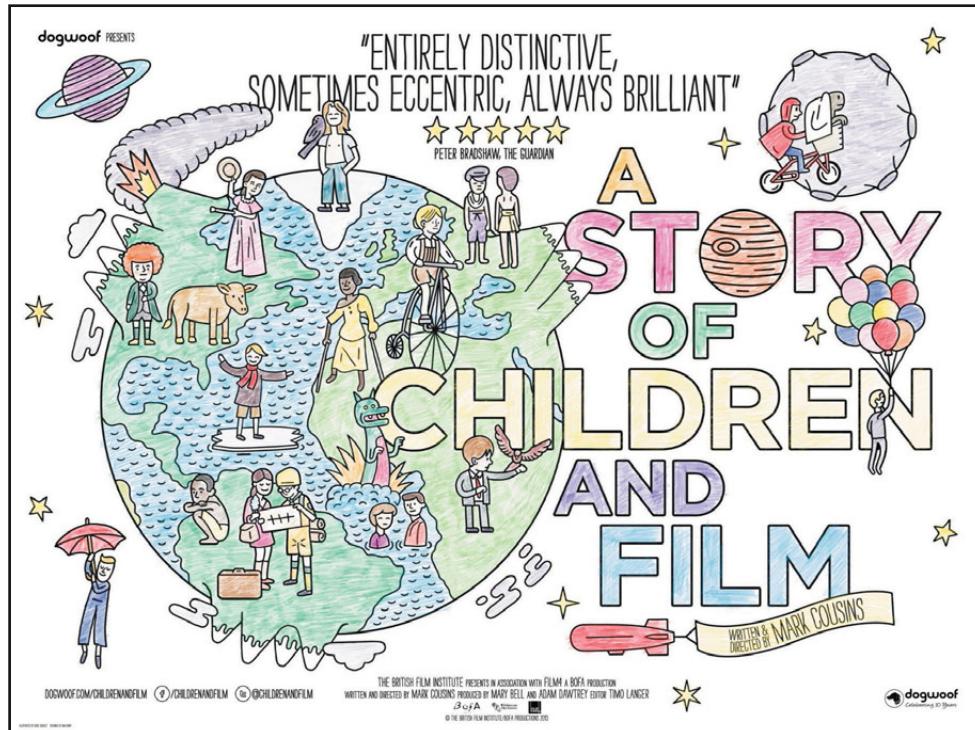
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A TALE OF TWO SISTERS

Suzanne, Katell Quillévéré's follow-up to *Love Like Poison*, is a complex family drama that confirms her as a singular talent to watch

By Jonathan Romney

The first feature by Katell Quillévéré – 2010's *Love Like Poison* (*Un poison violent*) – was a striking, confident debut, but of a fairly recognisable kind. The story of a teenage girl's religious and familial traumas in a Breton rural setting, the film fitted comfortably into a recognisable tradition of intimate French debut features about the pains of adolescence. Quillévéré was obviously a talent – but it wasn't yet clear quite how individual she might turn out to be.

Her follow-up *Suzanne* answers that question. It's a much more complex film, both in subject and in structure. It's about two sisters, first seen as little girls, and their lorry driver father (François Damiens), who's bringing them up alone. As the girls grow up, to be played by Adèle Haenel (Maria) and Sara Forestier (Suzanne), the script – by Quillévéré and Mariette Désert – jumps from episode to episode, leaving us to navigate the narrative and emotional shifts as Suzanne gets pregnant, then takes up with a young criminal, throwing the family into years of disorder.

When she brought *Suzanne* to the London Film Festival last October, I asked the Ivory Coast-born Quillévéré about the transition between her two features.

Katell Quillévéré: In some respects, I made *Suzanne* in reaction to *Love Like Poison*. I felt that film was too smooth, too harmonious. *Suzanne* isn't as close to me in terms of its subject, but it's just as close, maybe even more, because I put something else of myself into it – more violence, more freedom, less control. If you try to control a film too much and you don't let enough air in, that can be a sign of fragility.

Jonathan Romney: Despite the title, Suzanne herself is absent for much of the action.

KQ: Whenever she's absent, everything is haunted by her presence. For me, that's quite a bold statement. The title is our guide – it lets you know that even if Suzanne isn't at the heart of the story at the beginning, and even if she disappears later, nevertheless everything will be seen through her.

JR: Presenting Suzanne onstage at the LFF, you talked about cutting a lot of scenes from the film – making its fragmentary structure even more radical.

KQ: Originally, there was a lot more about the other characters – about the father's emotional life and his lonely existence as a lorry driver, a lot more about Maria. But Suzanne took up so much space that the other two characters weren't really able to exist separately from her. We lost a scene in which the sisters talk things out, and a major confrontation between Suzanne and her father. But the film didn't need them, because everything was already said elsewhere – in the body language, in the way people looked at each other.

In the final edit, we pushed all the ellipses a lot further. I felt Maria emerged much more strongly the less we showed of her:



Katell Quillévéré: 'I put more of myself into it – more violence, more freedom, less control'

because we didn't show her love life, her sacrifice for her sister emerged more strongly. Besides, when an actor takes hold of a part, you sometimes find that one scene says it all, and you can do away with two others.

JR: Both your features were shot by Tom Harari, but this one has a much harder, more modern look. You've said you were influenced by photography.

KQ: Yes, in particular American photographers from the 60s, notably William Eggleston, Stephen Shore [and the British photographer] Tom Wood... In their work, as in my film, the social aspect is to do with the spaces that people move through or inhabit. You especially see it in the wide shots in the film – the estate where the girls live as teenagers, the car parks, the cafeterias... Also Philip-Lorca diCorcia, who's more contemporary. He's very attentive to naturalism, but always

There's a real mystery, an opacity to the Leonard Cohen song... and that guided me in constructing the character



Tunnel vision: Suzanne

finds a sort of fantastic dimension in it. He uses available light a lot, light from fridges or mobile phones... That's really inspiring for cinema.

JR: Tell me about the casting. Since her debut in Abdellatif Kechiche's *L'Esquive*, Sara Forestier has tended to embody a barely containable energy, although she's more muted here.

KQ: I was obsessed with the idea that all Suzanne's energy should somehow be directed inwards – if that worked, it would give the character great intensity, but in a mode of sobriety and restraint. Sara's energy creates a contrast with the very sombre tone of the story.

JR: Maria is a harder role in a way – for much of the story, she's observing, reacting to the energies of her older sister.

KQ: Yes, but Maria is also pretty explosive. In the first part of the film, she's the one who's picking up boys in the nightclub, and driving at 100mph. Suzanne can be very rebarbative for the viewer – it's Maria who has the really attractive personality. Early on, Maria's the one who's free, the one for whom everything seems possible, whereas Suzanne is already trapped with a child. Later, it's all reversed: when Suzanne finds love, it's Maria who ends up looking after [Suzanne's son] Charlie, so that her sister can be free.

JR: The film ends with Nina Simone's version of the Leonard Cohen song 'Suzanne'. What's the connection?

KQ: I'd been to a Leonard Cohen concert and it really affected me, so it was in tribute to him that I called the film *Suzanne*. There's a real mystery, an opacity to that song – you can listen to it time and time again and never really understand it, and that guided me in constructing the character. I wanted a female protagonist who would be elusive and disturbing. **S**

i Suzanne is released on 14 March and is reviewed on page 86

THE INDEPENDENT'S
'DISCOVERY OF THE YEAR' – 2013

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Nymphomaniac

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Seven Samurai



Blue is the Warmest Colour



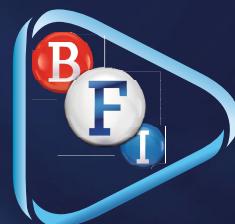
Stranger by the Lake



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A STORY OF TALEBI AND FILM

My evolving relationship with the work of the great Iranian director Mohammad-Ali Talebi is about to take an exciting turn



By Mark Cousins

We have relationships with filmmakers. We discovered them at certain moments in our lives, into which they slotted, through which they were woven. Your Orson Welles is not the same as mine. You and he have your own story. Orson and I have ours.

So it is with my relationship to one of the world's great directors, Mohammad-Ali Talebi. The story, our story, begins 22 years ago. I was working at the Edinburgh International Film Festival and wrote to Farabi, Iran's state film company, asking if they could send me any films. I had become fascinated by Iranian movies, but 1992 was before the internet and DVD.

About a month later, a carefully wrapped shoe box arrived, containing eight VHS tapes. One of them was *The Boot*, Talebi's 1992 film about a moany little girl who mithers to her mum until she buys her a pair of red boots, then loses one of them. I watched it and was taken. It was a road movie of sorts, because the boot had to be found, and was shot mostly with a neutral 50mm-ish lens. It was great on childhood fear – there's a lovely scene, a homage to Abbas Kiarostami, in which a boy is trapped in an alley by a snarling dog. Most notable was the intimacy. There seemed to be no distance between Talebi and the young actress, Samaneh Jafar-Jalali. And Talebi's close-ups, when they came, were clinchers.

The film became part of my life. In my film *The First Movie* I showed *The Boot* to Iraqi Kurdish kids who had never seen a film on the big screen before. They loved it. When Tilda Swinton and I did our Ballerina Ballroom Cinema of Dreams, we showed it and people in the audience cried.

On one of our subsequent collaborations, *A Pilgrimage*, in which we pulled a mobile cinema across parts of Scotland, Tilda and I decided to show Talebi's 1996 film *Bag of Rice*. In it, a girl helps a partially blind old lady to travel across Tehran to buy a sack of rice. Their quest uses many modes of transport, and in the process shows how a city works. The film takes the fable-like simplicity of *The Boot* and adds other Talebi tropes: a sense that we are seeing people at their best; an interest in everyday grace; what you could call the Talebi uplift, when you realise that you're watching something about everything; and plot points of such fine judgement that they seem like perfect moments. Tilda and I were seriously taken by Talebi now. When audiences for *A Pilgrimage* arrived by train at the tiny Highland station of Bridge of Orchy in Scotland, we stood on the platform holding placards, one of which said Mohammad-Ali Talebi.



We showed *Bag of Rice* twice at that festival. At the end of the second screening I looked around; people who didn't really know each other were hugging. I realised then that within the context of Iranian politics, *Bag of Rice*'s portrait of human harmony might seem conservative. Some might say that life isn't good in Tehran, so why show it as such, but I'd been to the city three times by then and knew that beyond the oppressions of the political elites, Tehran is a city of noticeable hospitality and cooperation. Talebi captures this. He had become my touchstone, my poster boy, my reminder that we don't need to look at the big stuff to see the best of people.

I'd made contact with Talebi in person by this point, and, since his work was not available on DVD, he sent me more of it. The third film of his that I watched was 2000's *Willow and Wind*, which was written by Kiarostami. It's set in a school. A classroom window has been broken by one of the kids. The teacher is frustrated by this, but uses the intrusion to talk about rain, its poetics. Then we meet the boy who broke the window, who sets out to find glass to mend

Talebi is my touchstone, my poster boy, my reminder that we don't need to look at the big stuff to see the best of people

it, and the story heads off. The boy in *Willow and Wind* is even more of a hunter-gatherer than Talebi's previous kids. Once again we see reality getting bigger, swelling with other truths. As a willow bends in the wind, so does the boy on the quest, so does the glass that he carries perilously back to the school. And, more than in the previous Talebi films that I've seen, there are unexpected story pivots and Hitchcockian touches of real tension.

Some time later, I made *A Story of Children and Film* (see page 37) and knew that *Willow and Wind* had to be part of it, perhaps central to it. In Q&As after screenings of my film, *Willow and Wind* was usually mentioned, and people often asked why they hadn't seen it before.

The chance to do so is coming soon. I've curated a touring season of movies, Cinema of Childhood, which is produced by Filmhouse and Adam Dawtrey, and funded by the BFI. At the centre of the season we've put the three Talebi films I've mentioned here. We invited him to attend the screenings and he said yes – his first trip to the UK – and before his screenings I'll do some onstage interviews with him. My imagined relationship with Talebi will become less so. The story of him and me will take another turn. Such pivots are about the love of movies, of course, but of life too.

Will I learn even more from him in person? Is it wrong to meet your heroes? This is my Talebi. Show me yours. 

DEVELOPMENT TALE

SVENGALI



Parting gift: Dixie and Shell (Jonny Owen and Vicky McClure, centre) prepare to move to London in *Svengali*

From viral webisodes to the big screen, Jonny Owen's music management comedy has been on a complicated journey

By Charles Gant

When Jonny Owen and his writer friend Dean Cavanagh first created the internet series *Svengali*, a feature film was a long way from their thoughts. A series of comedy sketches centred around a naive, enthusiastic band manager from Wales called Dixie, *Svengali* was inspired by the actor's own experiences in 1990s indie group The Pocket Devils. "The manager of the band, his name was Dixie in real life," Owen recalls. "He was indefatigable. He never had a bad day. He was always doing his best for the band, and we'd blame him for things all the time, as bands are wont to do."

Owen and Cavanagh cooked up the idea for the viral webisodes one rainy night in Soho around Christmas 2008, and early the next year the first in the series was posted to YouTube, featuring Owen as Dixie, trying to pitch new band The Premature Congratulations to his former schoolfriend, now a pretentious London record company executive (Roger Evans) who is trying to shed his past, including his childhood nickname, Horsey.

Social media at this stage was still in relative infancy – Twitter traffic was roughly one per cent of current levels – but the film attracted an audience, and former Creation Records boss Alan McGee agreed to appear in the second one. With rapid acclaim from the media – the *London Evening Standard* dubbed it "the best comedy on the net", Owen says – interest from broadcasters and production companies followed, and the creator found himself being courted by the BBC, Channel 4 and Channel Five.

"It was a proper up-and-down journey," says Owen, who has had lead roles in TV movies *Good Arrows* and *A Bit of Tom Jones*?, and appeared in series including *Shameless* ("as the gay Welsh copper who'd gone up North"). Group meetings tended to be the project's undoing: at the BBC, for example, BBC Wales and the online department were enthusiastic, but the comedy department was negative because "music-based comedy doesn't work – they'd done one the year before, and they didn't want to go down that route. So that was the end of the BBC."

At Channel Five, "Roger and I go in together and they were, 'We love this, [we're] thinking about a six-part series.' And then a week later, the guy who owns the *Daily Star* [Richard Desmond] took it over, and they were only going to be buying in *CSI* and big American series, and *Big Brother*, so that was that one out the window."

Continues Owen, "Then [TV production company] Wall To Wall came in, and they were setting up a comedy and drama department, with a guy called Tom Sherry – lovely guy. He'd seen the virals, rang me up, 'We love this, we want to take it on board, and develop it and we're going to make it into a TV series.' I was like, 'Amazing.' He gives us some money as well. And then a month later he left to go to Red [Production Company] in Manchester. The new woman came in, usual thing, they always kill all the babies when they take over the tribe. I just thought, 'Oh well, it's been online, it's done what it had to do, I'm quite happy, I'm an actor, I'll go and do other stuff, let it go.'"

Then came a call from Martin Root, who runs the Root creative agency in London. Owen had heard from plenty of similar companies, angling for payment for services they could provide to *Svengali*. "I remember saying to Martin, 'I haven't got any money, mate, I just do this myself, it's just an online thing.' And he went, 'Oh no, I'm interested in putting some funding into it.'" Root was interested in developing *Svengali*, but as a feature film, and already had a private investor interested. The only proviso was that Martin Freeman, who had appeared in one of the virals, signed on for the film. Despite a busy schedule, including Peter Jackson's *Hobbit* films and TV's *Sherlock*, Freeman completed

THE NUMBERS

DALLAS BUYERS CLUB

his shooting days – with Owen and Maxine Peake – in January 2012. With those scenes in the digital can, full financing and principal photography followed later that spring, with a week of pick-ups in the summer. Executive producer Henry Normal, from Baby Cow, took the lead on script development, says Owen. “He absolutely put me through the wringer: ‘Unless it’s driving the story forward, you’re just wasting our time.’ It was a great experience.”

The feature film version of *Svengali* tells the tale of Welsh postman Dixie (Owen), who comes to London with his loyal fiancée Shell (Vicky McClure), determined to turn the best unsigned band in Britain – the aforementioned The Premature Congratulations, aka The Prems – into superstars. Tensions in the band and a fierce bidding war, seemingly untethered from current economic realities, ensue. The cast mixes comedy names such as Katy Brand and Morwenna Banks with young actors including Michael Socha and Nichola Burley, plus Michael Smiley and Matt Berry.

When making the DIY webisodes, Owen benefited from generous support from all directions, be it Apple giving him a laptop to edit on, companies offering their offices as locations, or actors’ agents blithely ignoring the fact that their clients were working for free. If he hired a camera, Owen couldn’t afford the insurance on the £30,000 item, so would sleep with it in his bed

Henry Normal absolutely put me through the wringer: ‘Unless it’s driving the story forward, you’re just wasting our time’

after the shoot – “I was so nervous of anything happening to it” – and return it the next morning.

The tone of negotiations shifted when it came to the feature film: “The problems started when I had money to film. That’s when the agents started going, ‘Right, he wants a private contemplation space, and virgin milk in his coffee.’ It was never the actors.”

The soundtrack – which draws on music from each of the last six decades – proved relatively smooth, especially after The Who agreed to license a song. “That started the domino effect,” says Owen. “Everybody else fell into line.”

With *Svengali* premiering at last summer’s Edinburgh International Film Festival, then acquired by Universal with an eye on the home-entertainment market, the project has now nearly completed its five-year journey. Owen reflects that it was mostly down to his naivety that he embarked on *Svengali* in the first place. “Looking back, it was a bit mental. When we did the first episode, I didn’t know about insurance, and getting permission. Especially in Camden, where you can apparently get arrested for shooting on the streets without telling anybody. And imagine if anyone had gotten injured during shooting... If I’d known then what I know now, I probably wouldn’t have done it.” 

Svengali is released in cinemas on 21 March and is reviewed on page 87. The DVD is released on 7 April



Ballad of a thin man: Matthew McConaughey

By Charles Gant

By industry rule of thumb, a film should gross in the UK roughly one tenth of the US box-office figure, except in pounds instead of dollars. By that logic, *Dallas Buyers Club*, which after 17 weeks in the US had crawled its way to just shy of \$25 million, should look to achieve around £2.5 million at UK and Ireland cinemas. That would be a thoroughly decent result for a film with a title that may not be meaningful to cinemagoers (what is a Dallas buyers club, exactly?), based on the true story of a man who died of Aids. In fact the picture took just 11 days to reach £2.5 million here, and is sailing to a total far beyond it.

For the UK, eOne bought *Dallas Buyers Club* just over a year ago at the Berlin market. The acquisitions team liked the script, but it was the three-minute promo showcasing Matthew McConaughey’s performance that prompted it to pounce, buying UK rights four hours after viewing it. It didn’t hurt that eOne had distributed McConaughey title *Killer Joe*, and had *Mud* waiting in the wings. And with the production budget coming in under \$5 million, eOne’s UK boss Alex Hamilton says, “It wasn’t expensive. We thought: that’s going to be fine. It’s a smaller acquisition, and it’s good to have a good movie with a good actor.” *Killer Joe* had grossed £844,000 in the UK, and *Mud* went on to do £860,000. “We assumed the same financial scenario,” Hamilton says.

In the US, Focus Features released *Dallas Buyers Club* in November, and eOne considered a similar strategy. But by waiting

until 7 February, during the white heat of awards season, it was able to trumpet on its poster two Golden Globe wins (for McConaughey and co-star Jared Leto) as well as six Oscar nominations. Since it also had *12 Years a Slave*, opening on 10 January, the distributor attached *Dallas Buyers Club* to that upscale hit as its “trailer of choice”. It also took encouragement from the fact that, despite contributing essentially a cameo, McConaughey featured in the *Wolf of Wall Street* trailer. Hamilton says, “Here’s an actor who’s very much in his stride at the moment from an audience awareness perspective.”

Ditching the US “Dare to live” tagline, eOne went for “Sometimes it takes a hustler to change the world”, with McConaughey sitting jauntily on the hood of his muscle car. “He had a bit more attitude,” Hamilton says. “We went away from: he looks ill. It was not about being issue-based.”

Initially, eOne had toyed with a modest 125-screen UK rollout on its release date, expanding two weeks later, but with awards buzz building, and both McConaughey and Leto travelling in for an aggressive publicity campaign, the distributor went all out on 299 prints, debuting north of £1 million. Expanding to 371 cinemas by its third weekend, the film had taken a nifty £3.34 million after 17 days, and Hamilton believes it is on track for £4.5 million to £5 million.

“We’re very pleased,” he says. “I think if we’d gone in November with *Dallas Buyers Club*, it would have been very well received, done very well. But I don’t think it would have done the business that it’s done by waiting.” 

MATTHEW MCCONAUGHEY’S CAREER REINVENTION AT UK BOX OFFICE

Film	Year	Gross
The Wolf of Wall Street	2014	£20,963,772*
Magic Mike	2012	£8,389,472
Dallas Buyers Club	2014	£3,336,916*
The Lincoln Lawyer	2011	£2,081,349
Mud	2013	£859,557
Killer Joe	2012	£844,282
The Paperboy	2013	£419,677
Bernie	2013	£96,172

Cinema grosses in UK/Ireland. * still on release, gross at Feb 23

SHOCK VALUE

BFI FILM FUND INSIGHTS

Gay life has been transformed in the last 20 years, but gay cinema still faces the problem of how to be both audacious and mainstream



By Ben Roberts

It's the morning after the BFI's London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival launched its programme and new name, BFI Flare. It

feels like more than just a lick of paint. The programme's preface celebrates the new name as a reflection of the festival's increasingly diverse audience, and its greater inclusivity. (My own suggestion – BFI Open Wide – somehow didn't make the cut.) From dipping into Twitter, Flare seems to have had a largely positive response, although, not unexpectedly, there have been some complaints that the rebranding has relegated 'LGBT' to a subtitle. The programme, the new name and the positioning of Flare just a month after the BFI's 'Queer Pagan Punk' Derek Jarman season say something not just about how gay life has transformed in the past 20 years, but about how British gay cinema has evolved into something more benign, if no less interesting for the reasons behind its evolution.

Flare opens with a British debut: Hong Khaou's low-budget but effective *Lilting*, which premiered at Sundance in January. *Lilting* is a moving film about Richard, a young gay Englishman whose Chinese lover Kai has died and whose attempts to communicate with Kai's mother prove difficult. Like Andrew Haigh's debut *Weekend*, *Lilting* takes a fact-of-life approach to same-sex relationships, showing gay life as equal parts mundane and different, especially when sharing the universal pain of finding love and losing it.

We are now supporting Haigh's second feature, *45 Years* – a brilliantly written portrait of a (straight) marriage upended by a ghost from the past, starring Charlotte Rampling and Tom Courtenay – but it's a shame that the Film Fund didn't finance either *Lilting* or *Weekend*; I would have been proud of both. As a teenager, my own horizons were expanded by such groundbreaking films as Isaac Julien's *Young Soul Rebels* and Stephen Frears's *My Beautiful Laundrette*: there would be nothing more satisfying for me than to discover and support exciting new gay voices in British cinema. Yet original and accomplished gay-themed work is thin on the ground. A number of factors contribute: lack of confidence from financiers, distributors and broadcasters; limited visibility for strong new work in cinema over the past decade; and/or the possibility that TV drama has picked up the slack. So the trick is identifying where opportunities lie, what new gay British

Production budgets on many gay films remain low, limiting scale and ambition, narrowing their appeal. It's a vicious circle



Naked ambition: Stranger by the Lake

cinema should look like in 2014, and who it is for.

Haigh's current HBO series *Looking* has been called "post-gay" – his characters are comfortably 'out' in a universe almost exclusively gay, with no threat of heteronormativity waiting in the wings. His politics lie in the way he shrugs his shoulders to the concerns of traditional gay dramas. So the critical question is how much drama this 'new normal' can sustain on its own. Alain Guiraudie's *Stranger by the Lake* – released last month like a loud smack on a bare butt cheek – is anything but post gay. Its overt, explicit sexuality wraps its legs around a simple but tightly conceived thriller and when I first watched it I thought, wouldn't it be *incroyable* if we could produce a gay film here of such naked audacity? Something that puts the tradition for punk and outrage back in cinema, but sneaks it through the back door.

I'm not sure if that's likely in the near future, not least because we would need a director who – like Guiraudie – has been able to explore his themes and build his craftsmanship over a number of films. France has long supported and celebrated the intelligent approach to sexuality and shock shown by filmmakers such as Catherine Breillat and Gaspar Noé. Through our Distribution Fund, we have supported Peccadillo's UK release of *Stranger by the Lake*, which it wanted to push simultaneously in cinemas and via video-on-demand, to find a sizeable curious audience.

I have my fingers crossed, as VOD could be a valuable platform and source of income for gay cinema. Distributors and exhibitors continue to fret about the size and value of what is still considered a niche audience, and from my experience in foreign sales, there is generally speaking a single Peccadillo-style outfit in each territory – so sales income is limited too. This means production budgets on many gay films remain low, limiting scale and ambition, narrowing their appeal. It's a vicious circle.

Once in a blue moon, however, a more mainstream gay-themed film comes along, and later this year that Trojan horse is Matthew Warchus's *Pride*, a crowd-pleasing comedy drama with a joyous script by Stephen Beresford. The film is wholeheartedly British, rooted in the gay rights movement of the 1980s, yet unashamedly mainstream. Hopefully it will be cheered as an opportunity to understand where we are today, through the queer punk protests of the past. @bfbien

IN PRODUCTION

● **György Pálfi**, the Hungarian director of *Hukkle*, *Taxidermia* and *Final Cut: Ladies and Gentlemen*, may have set some kind of record with the breakneck production of his new film *Free Fall*. He shot it in January, edited it in February, is working on post-production through March, and aims to have it in cinemas for April. The film reportedly concerns a woman who jumps off the roof of a block of flats and, while falling, looks in on the lives of the other inhabitants of her building.

● **Warren Beatty**, who hasn't appeared in front of or behind a camera since 2001's *Town and Country*, has finally started filming his very, very long-gestating, as-yet-untitled Howard Hughes film, a version of which was mentioned at least as far back as the 1970s. As well as starring as Hughes, Beatty will direct his own script, in a film that reportedly focuses on Hughes's assistant (played by Alden Ehrenreich) and his love interest (Lily Collins). Annette Bening and Matthew Broderick also star in the \$26.7 million production, produced by Brett Ratner.

● **Yorgos Lanthimos**, the Greek director of *Dogtooth* and *Alps*, is to make his first English-language film. *The Lobster* is described as "an unconventional love story set in a dystopian future where finding a partner is a matter of life or death". The star-filled cast includes Colin Farrell, Rachel Weisz, Ben Whishaw, Léa Seydoux, Olivia Colman, Ariane Labed and Aggeliki Papoulia. Filming begins in Ireland later in March.

● **Edward Norton** was first attached to an adaptation of Jonathan Lethem's novel *Motherless Brooklyn* back in 1999, before the idea seemed to go cold. Norton had planned to write, direct and star in the film, about a man with Tourette's syndrome who turns detective to solve a murder. Now Norton's project is apparently being revived thanks to Brett Ratner, who will produce.

● **Duane Hopkins**, the British director of *Better Things*, is in post-production on his second feature, *Bypass*. Producer Samm Hailay has described the film as "a morality tale of society's feared and forsaken".

● **Zhang Yimou** (below) has completed work on his next film, *Coming Home*, based on Yan Geling's novel *The Criminal Lu Yanshi*. Set in China from the 1920s to the 1990s, it reunites Zhang with his most famous muse, Gong Li, eight years after they last worked together on *Curse of the Golden Flower*.





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SALVO

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Sal-vo, n.

1- In Italian, means Save.

2- In English, means
A simultaneous
discharge of firearms.

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY FABIO GRASSADONIA & ANTONIO PIAZZA

SALEH BAKRI SARA SERRAIOCCO WITH MARIO PUPELLA GIUDITTA PERRIERA
WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF LUIGI LO CASCIO



IN CINEMAS MARCH 21

SALVO

ODEON

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**CINÉ
LUMIÈRE**

BERLIN

NO ALARMS, NO SURPRISES

After a couple of unusually strong years at the festival, it's back to business as usual, with a glut of mediocre fare and only a handful of truly standout films

By Nick James

Experience teaches us to temper disappointments with the memory of earlier ones. I've been to the Berlinale enough times to know that this year's much-complained-about selection was not an exception, simply the norm. Expectations were set too high because the programmes for 2012 (which included *Caesar Must Die*, *Tabu*, *Barbara*, *Avalon* and many others) and 2013 (*Frances Ha*, *Gloria*, *Camille Claudel 1915*, *Child's Pose*, *Before Midnight*, *Computer Chess*) had been surprisingly strong – especially considering that producers dazzled by the promise of Cannes tend to hold their films back for that festival. But to come away, as I did, with only about seven films I'd really recommend (two of which had been in Sundance) was not so much a disaster, more like old times.

Berlinale boss Dieter Kosslick knows how to set the right mood, however, opening this year with Wes Anderson's *Mitteleropa* chase saga **The Grand Budapest Hotel** (covered in depth in our last issue), a film of such captivating detail and wistful charm – shot as if set on a giant wedding cake – that it ought to have sustained us for a day or two. However, the general mood went flat very quickly, especially after Rachid Bouchareb's US-Mexican border saga **Two Men in Town**, about a convicted murderer (an anguished Forest Whitaker) released into the tender mercies of a veteran desert-loving female parole officer (Brenda Blethyn – yes, you did read that right) and hounded by the local sheriff (Harvey Keitel, wooden as a totem-pole). Cloth-eared as to line delivery, full of cod-Arriaga portents of doom and creaking performances, this US remake of a 1973 Jean Gabin/Alain Delon vehicle choked on its own dust.

The early popular hit of the festival was Yann Demange's **'71**, a taut, insightful, moves-at-a-clip thriller set in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. Its premise is simple: Gary Hook (an excellent Jack O'Connell) is a wounded, disarmed private left behind by his unit in the Falls Road area of Belfast. When a well-connected Protestant child inadvertently leads him further into danger, Hook finds that the Provos want him dead, the

traditional IRA want to get him to trade him, the UDA couldn't care less and the murderous undercover units of the British army find him an inconvenience. In stark Darwinian terms, the film lays out how compromised, ruthless and determined to be right everyone involved in the Troubles was, but it always puts a bewildered, battered humanity to the fore. **'71** is every bit the gripping intrigue drama one hoped for, as splashily imagined as the best night-time graffiti and good at wrong-footing viewers' expectations.

In previous years I've usually tied myself to the Competition films. This year, however, I chose to roam more freely, to both good and ill effect. For instance, there was a marketing push behind Josephine Decker, a former documentarian (*Bi the Way*, 2008) who had two fiction features in the Forum section, *Thou Wast Mild and Lovely* and **Butter on the Latch**, which came with recommendations from *The New Yorker* and *Film*

Comment. I saw the latter, which has an arresting indeterminacy about the way its camera moves, its editing strategy and its emotional tenor. It's about what happens when two former female friends get together at a real-life Balkan folk song and dance camp in California. But that barely describes a deliberately oblique aesthetic approach that likes to hover around things, have people dream performance art, catch crowd scenes as if they were picked off a mood chart and get people to ad-lib scenes. Yet as often as *Butter on the Latch* dazzles, it also feels forced.

Religious divides constituted Berlin's obvious theme this year. In that context there's no doubt the scepticism of John Michael McDonagh's bittersweet *Sligo Bay* tragicomedy **Calvary** – about an Irish priest who is told he's got a week left to live by a would-be killer among his parishioners. *Calvary* offers competing blackly comic bitternesses through an ensemble cast of neat performers in caricatured roles with a sharp script that wants to be, according to McDonagh, *"Diary of a Country Priest* with a few gags thrown in." But considering how positive the word was from Sundance, I thought the film a half-convincing patchwork, too self-aware of how doubly ironical it was meant to be – despite the estimable Brendan Gleeson brooding winningly as the late-life widower priest whom the inhabitants of the town goad for his hypocrisy.

By contrast, the best discovery in Competition, Dietrich Brüggemann's **Stations of the Cross** (*Kreuzweg*), plays it semi-straight. The film portrays the life of Maria (Lea van Acken), a 14-year-old born into a fundamentalist Catholic family, as if she were Christ in his last moments on earth. It is difficult to write about this rigorous, note-perfect melodrama without spoiling the pleasure of watching it, so I'll keep the details spare. It begins with Father Weber (Florian Stetter) instructing Maria's religious study group about the meaning of sacrifice, which she – a pale, hollow-eyed, wilting figure – takes more seriously than she ought, partly out of a stubborn need to push back at her domineering mother (a wonderful, if exaggerated, Franziska Weisz). Executed with a small number of shots, each framed and timed to perfection by its ensemble cast and crew – not least van Acken herself – *Stations of the Cross*'s biggest surprise is its wicked sense of humour, which only enhances its perfect poise between belief and scepticism.

I've said online that Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard's documentary about Nick

BERLIN TOP TEN

1. **The Grand Budapest Hotel** Wes Anderson
2. **The Second Game** Cornelius Porath
3. **20,000 Days on Earth** Forsyth & Pollard
4. **Journey to the West** Tsai Ming-liang
5. **Stations of the Cross** Dietrich Brüggemann
6. **'71** Yann Demange
7. **Black Coal, Thin Ice** Diao Yinan
8. **Boyhood** Richard Linklater
9. **The Kidnapping of Michel Houellebecq** Guillaume Nicloux
10. **Stratos** Yannis Economides





Innocent abroad: Yann Demange's '71 focuses on a rookie soldier, played by Jack O'Connell, caught up in the nightmare of Belfast politics during the Troubles



20,000 Days on Earth



Calvary



The Second Game

 Cave, *20,000 Days on Earth*, is the most sophisticated rock star biog ever. That perhaps over-excited remark comes partly because I happen to believe that no one plays the rock star role better than Cave. He is just young enough for others to have come before him and made the worst mistakes. He must have learned something from every one of them to have survived so well. But to focus too much on my admiration for his consistency and devotion to his task would be to draw much-deserved praise away from the filmmakers of this enthralling, handsomely made piece. The film is grounded in Australian Cave's adopted hometown of Brighton where we follow one day in his life into which, by cunning and devious means, are woven live gigs, recording sessions and a fractured history of his life. He wakes to his PA's instructions on his answerphone, tends to his look, visits a one-off therapy session, goes to see his neighbour and collaborator Warren Ellis for lunch during which anecdotes about other performers predominate,

then visits his own archive where he discusses more shards of what he has done using images to prompt his memories. In between, we see him driving his car, which acquires ghostly passengers such as Ray Winstone, Kylie Minogue and former Bad Seed Blixa Bargeld, who appear and disappear having conversed with Cave (in scenes with more than a hint of *Holy Motors*). To say the film is beautifully shot by Erik Wilson is an understatement. Each image seems indelibly part of the interleaving of what makes Cave's world, and the singer himself is particularly eloquent about songwriting. In one visually explosive sequence, he waxes lyrical about the time he met his wife Susie Bick, who we only

Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard's documentary about Nick Cave, '20,000 Days on Earth', is the most sophisticated rock star biog ever

see in out-of-focus reflection or projection. It is a powerful moment in a remarkable film.

A perfect contrast to *20,000 Days* was provided by Annekatrin Hendel's *Anderson*, a minor talking heads-style documentary about Sascha Anderson, a rock star cum poet in East Germany who was discovered to be a long-standing informer for the Stasi. Though the film is very lo-fi and a little dull, it was salutary to witness the typical star ego in recovery from self-destruction and living anything but a glamorous life.

If I told you that the visuals of *The Second Game*, the most absorbing film I saw in the Forum, were simply and entirely those of a 1988 Romanian football match shown on local TV and played in a deepening snowstorm, you might not be stirred too greatly. If I told you that the game was between Steaua Bucharest (Ceausescu and the army's team) and Dinamo Bucharest (the secret police's team) and that it was refereed by the father of director Cornelius Popescu, you might still manage to restrain

THE GOLDEN BEAR MURDER BY NUMBERS

Diao Yinan's unexpected jury hit *Black Coal, Thin Ice* is an enjoyable, if unambitious and unremarkable, crime movie

By Geoff Andrew

To many Berlin attendees, it came as a surprise that James Schamus's jury had awarded the Golden Bear to Diao Yinan's *Black Coal, Thin Ice* (*Bai Ri Yan Huo*). This was not because the film is poor – it's a very decent crime movie – but because its ambitions are fundamentally generic and modest. Perhaps that's what appealed to the jury; certainly, screening quite late in the festival after so many earnest but dull movies, Yinan's pacy and entertaining policier felt like a chilly breath of fresh air.

In terms of its tortuous narrative and *noir*-inflected camerawork, the movie is a conventional trawl through familiar tropes. A prologue set in 1999 follows recently divorced detective Zhang (Liao Fan, who nabbed the Silver Bear for Best Actor) as he looks into the murder of a man whose body parts have turned up at various coal plants in northern China. An attempt to arrest a couple of suspects ends with four men dead and Zhang wounded and traumatised; five years later, he's working as a security guard and has the inevitable drink problem. But a new flurry of dismembered corpses prompts him to help his former colleague and keep an eye on a new suspect, the first victim's widow – with whom Zhang soon, equally inevitably, becomes infatuated. And nothing, of course, is as it seems...

Perhaps the most impressive aspects of

Diao's film are its highly atmospheric use of everyday but striking locations (grim factories, dismal streets and dark alleys, a skating rink) in the wintry coal-mining town and some genuinely surprising eruptions of violence: one blink-and-you'll-miss-it shootout is especially shocking. (It should be said, however, that notwithstanding the gruesome nature of the murders, the film shows a welcome restraint in what is actually shown.) Other sudden, jolting shifts of tone are less effective, disrupting the *noir* mood of mystery and menace, but Diao's evidently affectionate commitment to his story and characters manages to carry us through such blips. The result is a perfectly enjoyable, if mostly unremarkable, crime movie. But more than that? Ask Schamus and co. 



Black Coal, Thin Ice

JOURNEY TO THE WEST OF TIME AND THE CITY



Boyhood

your excitement. But for me this was one of the best experiences of the week. We watch the game with the original sound off and listen to father and son in the present day debating the niceties of refereeing such a politically volatile match. We learn that the father, Adrian, was approached by both sides before the match to influence the outcome and that he ignored them. We experience the way Romanian state TV cuts to the crowd or to snow falling on the trees rather than film any unsportsmanlike conduct – of which there is much in this keenly fought game of vicious looking sliding tackles. We listen as Cornelius suggests to his father that the game is rather like one of his fiction films in that “it’s long and nothing happens”. “Don’t you think with the snow falling that it’s somehow poetic,” the son suggests. “There is no poetry here,” says the father. I predict that the producers of the BBC’s *Match of the Day* will play that last moment some time in the next year.

By the final morning I was there (the eighth day), the Berlinale *habitues* were pining for something to agree on enjoying. What better to show them than Richard Linklater’s Sundance standout **Boyhood**? Shot over 12 years using the same cast, the film focuses on Mason (Ellar Coltrane, who was seven years old when the shoot began), who is raised principally by his mother Olivia (Patricia Arquette), a smart psychology student prone to make bad choices in men. This is unsentimental quotidian fiction made on the hoof and therefore anxious to duck too much sentimentality or indeed narrative drive. At the start, Olivia is already divorced from Mason Sr (Ethan Hawke), a well-meaning wannabe musician who who has just resurfaced after vanishing to Alaska. Soon Mason and his slightly older sister, Samantha (Lorelei Linklater), find themselves part of a more straight-laced setup, with a clean-cut, rules-fixated stepfather (Marco Perella) with two nice kids of his own. After he turns out to be a nasty drunk, a well-meaning former military man enters the frame, a figure who doesn’t much like the sensitive androgynous phase Mason goes through as pubescence arrives. While I would feel a curmudgeon not to praise the warmth, the toughness and the sheer humanity of this experimental project, I wish it had dispensed with a few of its moral lessons, which are delivered with just a hint of sanctimony. The Berlinale crowd, however, adored the film and Linklater certainly deserved the Silver Bear for Best Director. **S**

Tsai Ming-liang’s latest minimalist marvel follows a Buddhist monk walking at a snail’s pace through Marseilles

By Jonathan Romney

The film I saw at this year’s Berlinale that most felt like an event – purely because of its own aesthetic and imaginative achievements – was at once one of the biggest feature films and one of the smallest there. It was big because it happened to be projected on the mammoth screen of the CineStar IMAX, and it was small because it was an exquisitely minimalist piece of film art that lasted a concise 56 minutes.

The film was *Journey to the West* (*Xi You*) and it was the latest by Taiwanese master Tsai Ming-liang, whose *Stray Dogs* was one of the highlights of 2013 and was also, allegedly, his farewell to feature filmmaking. In a sense, you can see how it would have been hard for Tsai to go further in the direction indicated by that film, just as you couldn’t really imagine Béla Tarr easily following *The Turin Horse*.

But *Journey to the West* was not so much a follow-up to *Stray Dogs* as a sort of marginal addendum to Tsai’s feature work – and a reprise of an earlier piece, the short ‘Walker’, from the group portmanteau *Beautiful 2012* (made for the Chinese web video site Youku). Like that film and its two follow-up shorts, ‘No Form’ and ‘Diamond Sutra’ (also 2012), *Journey to the West* is simply about a red-robed Buddhist monk (Tsai’s regular lead Lee Kang-sheng) walking extremely slowly, in a spiritual and muscular Zen exercise that echoes the seventh-century pilgrimage from China to India of the monk Xuanzang.

There are two additions in *Journey to the West* – that axiom of French art cinema, Denis Lavant, and the city of Marseilles. Lavant is seen in extreme close-up in the opening shot, his face in shadow and as craggy as the landscapes of Mars, becoming a sculptural expanse on the vast IMAX screen. Lavant is seen again in profile in a couple of shots near the start – one of them, with his face in soft focus against a range of sunlit cliffs, suggesting a discreet homage to the sunlight in which Lavant basked in Claire Denis’s *Beau Travail*.

Lavant later reappears, following the monk down a crowded Marseilles street, in almost perfect synch. But for most of the film – comprising only 14 shots, and wordless apart from some overheard conversation among passers-by – Tsai follows the monk on his slow progression through the streets, past windows, through squares, sometimes filling the screen, at other times glimpsed in crowds or even seen as a foggy reflection in a mirror.

The film’s centrepiece shot, at some

The monk, the director and the audience all partake in a shared experience of slowness, contemplation and discipline



Act of faith: *Journey to the West*

20 minutes, is one of the most remarkable I’ve seen in recent cinema, as the monk – a silhouette backlit by a dazzling shaft of sunlight – descends a covered staircase while confused pedestrians make their own way up and down the stairs, some stopping to look, others dodging to avoid him. With Antoine Héberlé’s camera slowly, almost imperceptibly, shifting to reframe the monk, it’s an extraordinary, magical extended moment – and a decisive refutation of Martin Scorsese’s recent lament that there are no longer any great shots in cinema.

For me personally, Berlin has been a great place for minimalism: one of my absolute Berlinale favourites remains Sharon Lockhart’s event-free but detail-rich 2010 diptych *Double Tide*. It may seem incongruous to imagine cinema as precise and as intimate as Tsai’s being screened in the monumental space of an IMAX cinema, but seeing *Journey to the West* on this scale was a revelation.

That’s partly because the film’s sculptural element came magnificently to the fore: one shot shows a crumbling, cracked red-painted wall that fills the screen until the monk’s hand gradually glides into shot. And partly because Tsai magnificently uses every corner of the screen, which you get to scrutinise in depth, craning your head to scan its details: notably in the final shot, in which you find yourself desperately searching for the monk somewhere in a crowd reflected upside down in a mirrored canopy.

The term ‘Slow Cinema’ has suffered its abuses and certainly some overuse, but *Journey to the West* represents a refined limit-case of what slow cinema can be – and itself offers a speculation on the uses and meanings of slowness for filmmakers, viewers and performers alike. The monk, the director, the audience all partake in a shared experience of slowness, contemplation, concentration and discipline: for the viewer, *Journey to the West* may not be quite as demanding of Zen rigour as for the film’s walkers (or for Lee and Lavant themselves), but Tsai’s latest certainly refocuses your mind, your perceptions and your own inner time in a way that few films do, whatever their tempo. **S**

Jonathan Glazer's extraordinary adaptation of Michel Faber's novel 'Under the Skin' is a collision between the surreal and the very real, as an extraterrestrial Scarlett Johansson tours the Scottish countryside in search of prey

By Jonathan Romney

What would a truly alien cinema be like? We can all think of filmmakers whose structures of imagination so fundamentally diverge from recognisable norms that they seem virtually extraterrestrial. And there have been numerous attempts to imagine how an alien might experience our world, whether it's literally an evocation of extraterrestrial experience (*The Man Who Fell to Earth*, 1976; *Liquid Sky*, Slava Tsukerman's 1982 essay in subculture-chic sci-fi) or depictions of radically alien, or alienated, worldviews pertaining to existence as, say, a vampire (Jarmusch's recent *Only Lovers Left Alive*) or a schizophrenic (Lodge Kerrigan's *Clean, Shaven*, 1993).

Cinema's latest attempt to imagine itself into such a viewpoint is *Under the Skin*, the third feature



UNEARTHLY STRANGER



A MAN OBSESSED
Jonathan Glazer (below) spent nine years working on *Under the Skin*, his adaptation of the 2000 novel by Michel Faber, starring Scarlett Johansson, right



PHOTOGRAPH BY FABRIZIO MATESE



by British director Jonathan Glazer – and a leap into seriously experimental territory following his relatively conventional *Sexy Beast* (2000) and *Birth* (2004). The premise: an extraterrestrial takes the form of a young woman (Scarlett Johansson) and drives round Scotland, exploring the mysteries of existence on earth in between sessions of the work she's here to do, which involves picking up unsuspecting men in her van.

The film is based on the 2000 novel by Michel Faber, but it's by no means a straight adaptation. Faber's book is black comedy: its protagonist is a female extraterrestrial named Isserley, posted to earth to capture human males for consumption on her home world as de luxe charcuterie. Born a furry quadruped, Isserley has been surgically transformed, to her enduring horror, into a two-legged, hairless thing that stands upright. Worse still, she has had two strange bulb-like appendages transplanted onto her front – irresistible lures, apparently, for the male hitchhikers she picks up. Among other things, the book is a Swiftian satire about the callousness of factory farming, playing with provocative humour on the categories of 'human' (applied to the aliens) and 'animal' (to the earthlings, or 'vodsels'). It also muses wryly on solitude, how it is to be a woman among men, notions of ugliness and beauty, the problem of finding job satisfaction, and the beauty of the Scottish countryside.

Glazer, who worked on *Under the Skin* for some nine years, collaborated with three screenwriters in succession, and says that the first draft was much closer to the novel. The final version, written with Walter Campbell, pares Faber's story to its starker essence: divesting Isserley of her name; replacing the other aliens with a mysterious associate on a motorbike; and replacing the elaborately grisly processing plant with imagery that is considerably more enigmatic and dreamlike. The result is a spare, distinctly chilly, poetic vision.

The film's utter strangeness derives partly from its audacious juxtaposition of two registers – the surreal and the very concrete real. In its nightmare mode, the

film creates some hauntingly mysterious and largely unexplained images. The alien is sometimes seen in spaces of pure black or white, of indeterminate dimension. One such space contains the film's most startling visual conceit, a dark reflecting surface that behaves as a solid floor to the alien but as a viscous pool to unwitting humans, who sink into it: beneath the surface, men hang suspended as if in aspic until their bodies implode, their skins floating like discarded shrink wraps. Then there's the eerily beautiful opening sequence, an almost abstract play of expanding circular shapes that evokes either planets coming into alignment or the opening of an alien eye (it's hard to shake off the idea that the film begins by staring at us).

The film's other register is everyday realism: much of the time, we seem to be watching an attractive but altogether unexceptional-seeming young woman driving a van around Scotland, picking up male hitchhikers and flirting with them. When she's not at the wheel, she visits shopping malls, buys lipstick, strays into a night-club, explores the Scottish countryside. She's barely noticed by the crowds that she moves through – and certainly not recognised as Scarlett Johansson by any of the men she picks up. For the alien's prospective victims are for the most part not actors but unsuspecting non-professionals who were approached by Johansson and who chatted with her without realising that she, and they, were actors in an improvised drama that was being secretly filmed by Glazer.

All of this gives the film a vivid quasi-documentary dimension, an element of surveillance cinema – or even of 'stunt' cinema (Scott Foundas's thumbs-down *Variety* review compared it to "a feature-length *Candid Camera*"). *Under the Skin* might be considered a documentary about the making of *Under the Skin*, and about the mechanics of seduction. It's fascinating to observe the different reactions of these various working-class Scottish men to this alluring woman with her exaggeratedly seductive English 'posh-bird' accent and come-hither

It's fascinating to observe the different reactions of these working-class Scottish men to this alluring woman with her exaggerated 'posh-bird' accent

CAPTAIN SCARLETT
In *Under the Skin* Johansson was secretly filmed chatting to unsuspecting non-professionals, who had no idea until later that they were going to appear in a movie



AWAY FROM THE PICTURE

Inspired by her modern classical experiment 'Chopped and Screwed', it took Jonathan Glazer barely ten seconds to choose Mica Levi as the composer of 'Under the Skin'

By Jonathan Romney

A key element of *Under the Skin* is its score by young British composer Mica Levi. She's created an unnerving soundscape that represents a strain of modern composition almost entirely absent in mainstream cinema (a rare recent exception being Martin Scorsese's *Shutter Island*, with its use of Penderecki, Schnittke and Cage, echoing the similarly modernist soundtrack of *The Shining*).

Levi is herself something of an alien interloper in the world of film music. Trained in composition at the Guildhall School of Music, she made her name both DJ-ing and with her group Micachu and the Shapes, their two albums *Jewellery* and *Never* mixing the angularity and abrasiveness of late-70s post-punk with an exuberant pop energy. But it was the modern classical experimentation of their *Chopped and Screwed*, recorded live with the London Sinfonietta, that offers a taster of the radical strangeness of Levi's film score.

Jonathan Romney: Why do you think

Jonathan Glazer was interested in what you could bring to the film?

Mica Levi: I think he wanted a novice – someone who didn't know how to write film scores. He didn't want the score to manipulate the audience unnecessarily. I was told to write *away* from the picture at the beginning. It was great working with someone who isn't talking to you specifically in musical language – Jon is amazing at describing things.

JR: The film has a very precise and complex sound design. How did the music work in tandem with that?

ML: Johnnie Burn [the sound designer] wanted it to be really cohesive and homogeneous, the sound and the music. We were sending updated versions of where we were at all the time and trying to keep each other in the loop, to allow space for each thing. There was one bit that we couldn't quite get, towards the end, and Johnnie raised one thing in the sound – it was a zip – and it made such a difference to the drama of the shot. I couldn't believe it.

JR: You make very material use of the sound of instruments – for example, you really highlight the scrape of the strings.

ML: That's definitely true. A lot of it's microtonal – and I like that, it sounds like



Mica Levi: 'A lot of the things in this film relate to watching Disney films when I was young'

unison. It sounds more uncontrolled because it sounds like a lot of people playing, instead of just one. Instead of the 12 tones we're used to, it's wavering in between them, and [using] the clashes that they create – which can sound out of tune, but can be more expressive because it's not precise and accurate. To me it sounds comforting. It's meant to sound uncomfortable, but I find something quite human about it.

JR: There's a very striking three-note theme that recurs. At the start it sounds sexual and slinky, like a film noir femme fatale theme – but by the end, it's decaying and suggests the character's inner torment.

ML: She uses that theme – it's her tool. At the beginning, it's like fake – it's her perfume, it's the way she reels in these guys with a tune. Then it deteriorates, it becomes sadder. We called it the 'capture' melody. Then there's this major triad, a warm chord, and that's her 'human' or 'love' feeling. And there's this darker minor triad of trilled strings that recurs throughout.

JR: There's also a strange 'beehive' effect – a buzzing that suggests a hive mind. Hearing

Jonathan wanted a novice – someone who didn't know how to write film scores. He didn't want the score to manipulate the audience unnecessarily

it, you make that science-fiction connection – you think about what world she's from.

ML: Yeah, that's exactly it. We were talking about the dark at the beginning, and creation and how that all works – and this alien language.

JR: You seem to use quite a restricted palette. How many musicians were there?

ML: It was written electronically, so it was easy to see what the sound world would be like. It uses a lot of MIDI strings, fake sounds. I like the 'foreverness' of it – you can hold this chord and it goes on until you lift your hand. It's something eternal and programmed. It's a mixture of that and real strings, flute and percussion. I worked with maybe 12 musicians. If I was to perform it, I'd probably double the amount of strings – and I'd probably have synth playing alongside it.

JR: How does the score relate to your training in composition?

ML: A lot of the things in this film relate to watching Disney films when I was young. I had a phase of writing fake Romantic music just before doing this... [Studying composition] I was exposed to a lot of 70s music – Xenakis, Stockhausen, then Cage, Nono, Ligeti, Varèse...

JR: Do you admire any film composers?

ML: I often find film scores a bit pandering – they sound like a film score. But I watched James Bond while I was working on the film and I couldn't get my head out of what the music was doing. **S**

conversation. Some seem ready to rise to the bait, some don't seem to notice the come-on, others retreat into their shell, but all in all, the real-life men are as oblivious to Johansson's imposture as their fictional counterparts are to the predatory alien's ploy.

A curious lesson of the film is this: take a Hollywood star out of her conventional habitat, the artificial firmament of movie sets and red carpets, and chances are, she'll be unrecognisable. Johansson often projects a cartoonish hyper-sexuality (see *Don Jon*, or her recent Sodastream ad). But detached from all the elements that identify her as 'Scarlett Johansson' the movie siren, she becomes simply a woman in a cheap-looking furry jacket and slightly scraggy dark hair who, like other women, has to don a mask if she's to play the overt seductress. This is made evident when the alien tries on lipstick in a shop, but her being is *all* make-up: she's wearing a disguise, the borrowed human body she occupies.

The theme of beauty and ugliness, inner and external being, is pushed further when the alien picks up a man with a disfigured face. She apparently recognises that he looks different from other humans, and adjusts her come-on lines accordingly: "When was the last time you had a girlfriend?... You have very nice hands." It's an acutely uncomfortable scene to watch, partly because of the man's discomfort, partly because the woman is so manifestly unaware of the usual social responses to the way he looks. But it's likely that viewers will also misread the situation: many will assume, as I did, that the man's appearance was created through prosthetics or CGI, whereas in fact he is an actor named Adam Pearson, whose disfigurement is the result of a condition called neurofibromatosis. He lends his own appearance to the film in a way that invites us to reappraise our attitudes to surface appearance, especially since we know by this point in the film about the true nature of the alien – about what's under her perfect skin.

From the start, *Under the Skin* is a film about the eye and perception. To invoke the British poetic school of the 70s/80s, it's an example of 'Martianism', allowing us to see a familiar world as profoundly strange: Glazer's alien encounters several aspects of earth culture that she finds inexplicable (a TV clip of Tommy Cooper) or literally indigestible (Black Forest gateau). This is a film that looks, feels and sounds radically different – in which words play a drastically restricted part, and with an eerie sound design accompanying Mica Levi's unnerving score. Inevitably, *Under the Skin* has met with polarised reactions: initial dismissals from critics in Telluride, then intense

enthusiasm from British critics in Venice. That's only to be expected: a film so audacious, so different down to the molecular level, leaves a lot to the viewer's perception. What *Under the Skin* finally is is a matter of what meets the eye – and as the film shows from the very start, not all eyes work alike.

Jonathan Romney: Your adaptation radically pares down the original book. What was the logic of that?

Jonathan Glazer: There was something inside the book that I was very connected to. The first drafts were much more faithful and illustrative. It was a good adaptation – I just realised I didn't want to make the book at that point. I was looking for the thing in the book that I was interested in, and it became clear with time that it was the perspective – *her*, the lens – that spoke to me. It wasn't till I worked with the third writer, Walter Campbell that we found that point of view and that language.

JR: There's very little dialogue in the film, and when there is dialogue, the woman's language is part of her disguise. You're denying us everything we normally associate with character – we don't know who she is when she's not performing. She doesn't even have a name.

JG: The closer we got to finding a way of credibly making a film about an alien, the more committed we were to that position. Why would you have a name? Who's going to call her by that name? Once you've said you're going to make a film about an alien, then you're going to make a film about an alien.

JR: You're working in two different modes in one film – elaborate dreamlike sequences and extreme naturalism.

JG: That clash seemed to be where it happened, the buzz of it – putting that real world cheek by jowl with the surreal dream spaces. The dream space then takes on so much more of its own reality because of what's preceded it. When pitching the film, the term 'science fiction' comes up. The artifice of all that stuff – spaceships and weapons and helmets and lights – is something that I love to watch in films, but it didn't feel like it had a place here.

JR: The opening sequence is very abstract, but it suggests the idea of an eye coming into being – of an adjustment in her vision, which is also inviting the viewer to adjust to a different way of seeing the world.

JG: That's what it is. In early drafts, we had the creation of her body and her tongue docking into her mouth, images where you saw much more of her construction, and even her training. It became one scene – it became distilled into the most important image, which is the construction of her eye. Her eye is just a window – it's a method of



ON THE TILES
Scarlett Johansson encounters Scottish clubbers in *Under the Skin*.
Below: Nicole Kidman in *Birth* (2004); Ben Kingsley and Ray Winstone in *Sexy Beast* (2000)



BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (2)



looking, a telescope. When the thing comes up the tube and it lights up, you realise that you've been looking at the construction of an iris. But you've also been privy to the fact that there's nothing human whatsoever about it, that it's a masquerade, and that what's inside it is the opposite of us. It's like maths meeting meat.

JR: Did you hesitate about whether to reveal her real body at the end?

JG: Absolutely. But the reason we did it was, I don't feel like that is the real body. It wasn't like, here's a lizard in a suit. To me it was the next layer – I don't think you feel like you've seen the alien, you've seen the inside. We had a line in the screenplay which was a description of that moment: "The inside looking at the outside, the outside looking at the inside." The closest you see of the alien in this film, as far as I'm concerned, is an entirely black screen.

JR: One of the film's themes is the human body and its limitations, and what it is to be trapped – as she is on an unfamiliar planet, as we are in being human. Related to that is the man with the disfigured face.

JG: The body-soul thing, that paradox – the pleasure of consciousness and life and being in a body, and also how troubling it is and mystifying – is key in the film. That man has an appearance that doesn't trouble her; she's aware of it in that she can see it, but she has no judgement, because she's not interested in him. He misreads that as warmth, I suppose, a different kind of lack of judgement. She's interested in what's inside the skin for a different reason – the skin, to her, is nothing more than a plastic bag. It throws beauty into focus, as well – his beauty and her lack of it. It's a turning point, that scene.

JR: The idea of shooting clandestinely – when did that come in and what was the logic?

JG: I had a real reluctance to cast the film with someone well known, but I knew we had to. Scarlett and I had chatted over the years about this project, we were orbit-

Some guys are flirting with her, meeting her gaze, and some are absolutely terrified by her. You see men as they are in those moments

ing each other for three or four years before we finally agreed to do it. The idea of surveillance, of shooting in disguise, I think came from a kind of a joke – let's put a mask on her. Shooting the way we did went hand in hand with the narrative.

JR: There's something appropriate about the idea of a Hollywood star suddenly placed on Sauchiehall St and being an alien.

JG: Completely. The first couple of weeks of prep, Scarlett had to learn to speak with an English accent. Well, that's an equivalent to the story right there – the same as driving on the left-hand side, she had to learn that too. In the scene with the eye, you hear her voice, all the phonetics she's going through – that's because I sat in a room and listened to her doing her voice exercise. I realised that was part of the film as well.

JR: Where were the cameras hidden?

JG: There were ten cameras. Sometimes we shot with two, but most of the van scenes were shot with eight. They were built specially for this film, because they didn't exist. Shopping malls, nightclubs, restaurant... In the nightclub there's a cameraman with a camera sticking out of his sleeve on the floor, following her around.

JR: How did you select the people you shot?

JG: By being in the van and saying to Scarlett, "Turn left here, turn right, what about that guy?" I'm in the back with a microphone, she's got an earpiece, all the wires lead from these eight hidden cameras into the back – eight little mini-screens, I can see all the angles. The film is writing itself at that point. She'd pull over and try and get someone's attention; you'd film the person, and afterwards a PA would go and tell them what we'd been doing, and can we have his consent?

JR: How did people react?

JG: Jaw on the floor, but most people gave their consent. Some didn't – there were some fantastic scenes we couldn't use. That was another benefit of shooting in Glasgow. I don't think you could have shot that film in London. First of all, you'd have SWAT teams – you'd find yourself with a laser light at your forehead in ten minutes, because we had guys walking around with rucksacks with wires sticking out of them.

JR: Scarlett Johansson is normally very recognisable, and heavily identified with sexuality, in a way that becomes weird here. These men don't know that it's Johansson flirting with them.

JG: You see very different reactions. Some guys are flirting with her, meeting her gaze, and some are absolutely terrified by her. You see men as they are in those moments. What I like about her sexuality in this film – particularly in the mirror scene, where she's completely naked – is that she's almost de-eroticised her own image. She's reclaimed her image.

JR: How did you choose Mica Levi to write the score?

JG: Mica is an extraordinary talent. I'd never heard of her. My music producer Peter Raeburn suggested her alongside some other composers, but my instinct a while ago was that it would be a new person, someone unknown to us. He played me [her album] *Chopped and Screwed*, and about ten, 15 seconds in, I'd made my mind up. What I heard in the music was another universe – a different soundscape... 

 **Under the Skin** is released in the UK on 14 March and is reviewed on page 89

BETWEEN THE WALLS

David Mackenzie's savage prison drama, which tells the story of a violent young offender who is transferred to the same prison wing as his estranged father, represents a high point in the versatile career of one of Britain's most undervalued directors

By Trevor Johnston

We don't see the blade going in, but hearing it is shocking enough. Like a jacket being hurriedly zipped up, or someone scything into a watermelon, it's the sound of Jack O'Connell's razor-wielding juvenile parting the skin on the cheeks of an unfortunate fellow inmate. Visceral stuff indeed, shot and choreographed for maximum impact, and certainly not the only moment of punishing violence in David Mackenzie's full-on prison drama. Yet by the end of the film we're shedding tears for the very soul of this wideboy thug, made acutely conscious of the vulnerable, flawed but not unredeemable individual behind the bared teeth and sinewy aggression.

That's quite a journey for the character, performers, filmmakers and audience alike, *Starred Up* proving not only emotionally draining but also a high watermark of accomplishment for director Mackenzie. With a track record including assured literary adaptations (*Young Adam*, *Hallam Foe*), ambitious apocalyptic sci-fi on a budget (*Perfect Sense*), a flirtation with Los Angeles glitz (*Spread*), even a rock festival frolic shot in four days (*You Instead*), he has now turned out eight enterprising features in the past 12 years, though industry respect and admiring critical notes haven't quite translated into box-office appeal. It's left one to wonder whether Mackenzie might just be Britain's most undervalued filmmaker.

Starred Up should surely impact on that state of affairs, since the potent way it convinces us to care about the sort of individuals we might possibly cross the street to avoid is remarkable indeed. "I suppose it's about loving the characters who're unlovable," observes the Northumberland-born, Glasgow-based 47-year-old, though 'unloveable' is somewhat understating it when it comes to O'Connell's wrecking-ball protagonist, a young man so up for a rumble his instant impulse when assigned his new cell is to fashion a lethal handmade weapon from a melted toothbrush and a disposable razor. Not that master Eric Love should even be there in the big boys' prison in the first place, since he's just been transferred from a young offenders' institution unable to contain him. 'Starred up' is the prison-service terminology for this particular strand of discipline problem, and authenticity's clearly the watchword throughout, since the script came out of writer Jonathan Aser's experiences working in the education unit at Wandsworth Prison.

His unconventional odyssey from HMP to silver screen was covered by Charles Gant's 'Development Tale' in last month's *Sight & Sound*. Suffice to say that it's not just the observant detail and slangy dialogue that are key here, but also the central dramatic confrontation – worked in by Mackenzie during the course of honing the project – which places O'Connell's troubled youth on the same wing as his estranged dad (grizzled Aussie character actor Ben Mendelsohn). Both generations are thus compelled to address their painful past while placed in a testosterone-pumped environment in which sentiment is too easily taken for weakness. "The vast majority of prisoners want to keep their heads down and get out of there," comments Mackenzie, talking via Skype. "But for the gladiators, that small majority, it's all about status, power and standing your ground. It's like they're preparing for war. At the same time though, it was Ben Mendelsohn who said to me that the discussion group in the story, in which Jack and other prisoners are trying to learn to de-escalate their aggression and control their anger, that's the place where the real men are. Ben's character, the father, can hardly go in there. And when he does he can't sit down, can't even touch the empty chair. To do so would open this whole emotional can of worms that he's just not prepared to deal with."

It's not long before there's blood on the floor and even bite marks on the genitalia of one unlucky prison warden, since sorting things out with his errant dad is lower down O'Connell's to-do list than proving to all-comers he can look after himself at close quarters, and engaging in a battle of wills with the jargon-spouting private-sector management team concerned that ill-discipline costs them money. Thanks to O'Connell's scarily believable performance it's an involving watch, yet far from easy or ingratiating, since the character's tendency to stick boot, bonce or blade in first, and then worry about the consequences, makes him a protagonist whose worth only gradually makes its impression on us as he gradually gains a wider perspective on his place in the world. In that sense, while the film has even more juice and adrenalin than the director's *oeuvre* to date, Eric Love is a not untypical Mackenzian individual, since the latter's releases have consistently offered up central characters who are a testingly contrary bunch. Relatable be damned.



SEEING THE LIGHT
Jack O'Connell's violent prison thug Eric Love gradually gains a wider perspective on his place in the world in *Starred Up*, directed by David Mackenzie (right)



– this lot, in Mackenzie’s words, “tend to dance to their own intuition”.

Back in 2003, the director’s long-gestating adaptation of Scottish Beat author Alexander Trocchi’s brooding novel *Young Adam* set a thematic benchmark with its singularly uncompromising chronicle of restless bargee Joe, played by Ewan McGregor. Mackenzie’s second feature after what he describes as his “experimental” Highlands horror *The Last Great Wilderness*, *Young Adam* sees Joe wilfully destroying the marriage of his boss Tilda Swinton when he fucks her, as a way of banishing any thoughts of responsibility for the tragic end to his previous relationship with main squeeze Emily Mortimer. For Jamie Bell’s eponymous messed-up adolescent in *Hallam Foe* in 2006, the rite of passage after the death of his mother involves voyeuristic tendencies, and confounding impulses to kill, have sex with or shop his stepmother to the police for murder. In *Asylum*, starring the late Natasha Richardson, the ‘don’t go there’ moment involves her starting an affair with a psychotic artist in the care of her husband’s psychiatric hospital, an exhilarating yet seemingly doomed outlet from her suffocatingly dull wifely duties. For both gigolo Ashton Kutcher in *Spread* and chef Ewan McGregor in *Perfect Sense* the issue is how long they can pursue their busy sex lives without any element of meaningful human contact. That’s a proposition



 tested in radically different contexts – respectively, shiny upscale LA where every physical and emotional transaction is bought and paid for, and Glasgow in the grip of an inexplicable global crisis where human identity is shaped anew by the gradual loss of our senses.

There's not a conventionally empathetic centre of attention among that lot, all of whom perceive themselves as somehow apart from the standards or conventions guiding the rest of society. It's a connection, however, that Mackenzie recognises but doesn't see as entirely useful. "I'm not really interested in creating a theme pattern for my work and linking it together in terms as broad as that," he adds, an undertone of firmness in his voice. "However, there is a rebel in me that's attracted to the sort of people who think the rules don't apply to them. Those are the most interesting characters and I suppose they do share an anti-heroic aspect I connect with – primarily because the heroic is something which cinema has pretty much trampled to death in some pretty poor ways."

'IT'S HAND TO MOUTH AT TIMES'

A common factor in Mackenzie's releases to date, unfortunately, is that his films have never really attracted the audiences they deserve, and it's certainly possible that this ambitious propensity for gnarly material, and his fondness for genre hybrids – was *Hallam Foe* an Oedipal romantic thriller, or was *Perfect Sense* a faux-doc apocalyptic love story? – might have contributed to his undoing at the box office. Still, on the evidence of *Starred Up*, it's certainly not put him off following his own particular path. He's shown remarkable resilience in building a noteworthy filmography, rooted in his production base at Sigma Films, where co-founder and stalwart producer Gillian Berrie has not only developed strong international links with regular partner Zentropa in Denmark, but also transformed the old Govan Town Hall into the studio facility and office space Film City Glasgow, which is a major addition to Scotland's filmic infrastructure. "We've never had a major hit, so we're not a rich company – quite the opposite, in fact," Mackenzie admits. "It's hand to mouth at times, and while it might have been nice to have had a bit more money for *Starred Up*. I'm happy we made the film when we did, in the way we did. It's definitely the project over which I've had most control."

There is a rebel in me that's attracted to the sort of people who think the rules don't apply to them. Those are the most interesting characters

With a four-week February window in which to commandeer Belfast's 1845-vintage Crumlin Road Gaol (now a museum), Mackenzie chose to film in sequence and edit as he went along, which enabled director, cast and writer to fine-tune the material during the shoot – to the extent of working out the powerful final scene on the very last day of filming. "The location helped us hugely, and when you're making a film like this in such close proximity, the characters tend to come alive by themselves. Shooting sequentially, and having a rough cut at each point of what we'd already shot, gave everyone a chance to evolve their performances and reflect on all the stuff that had happened to them. There was a strength and unity about that, and I was certainly buoyed up that my decision to take that route paid dividends."

Paying close attention to *Starred Up* is a rewarding process, since the widescreen camera gives the impression of being a combatant in the action, yet there's no fashionable mock-*vérité* image-shake here. Instead Mackenzie's framing observantly picks out the institution's myriad contests of status and authority without sacrificing in-the-moment hustle and flow. Typical of someone who claims his youthful stint tearing tickets at London's Everyman repertory cinema proved a key part of his celluloid education, Mackenzie cites Bresson's *A Man Escaped* (1956) as a key inspiration for "its strong sense of purity and simplicity", rather than a more obvious homegrown reference in Alan Clarke's *Scum* (1979). Then again, Mackenzie's films have often shone brightest when he allowed the characters' uncontrollable urges to overwhelm the poise of his formal control, whether it's the near-infamous custard-splashed sexual confrontation in *Young Adam*, Jamie Bell strenuously unable to resist the sexual advances of his wicked stepmother in *Hallam Foe*, or the shocking rupture of normality in *Perfect Sense* when taste-deprived kitchen staff voraciously devour their store cupboard. This time round though, Mackenzie agrees that anchoring the film in authentic prison experience provides a new dimension to his work.

"*Perfect Sense* was a massively metaphorical film which threw out lots of poetic ideas. *Starred Up* is definitely trying to diminish those poetics – though they are still there – in favour of something which is much more real and perhaps more open to an audience which doesn't want to look at things in that poetic way. I don't know if that makes it more audience-friendly, but when you get to the stage where you've had a number of films which haven't had the profile you hoped they would have had, you do begin to ponder these things. Somehow I feel I've discovered realism late in life."

Whether this marks the start of a new creative chapter is still open to conjecture, since Mackenzie's seemingly innate Renoir-ish ability to look at all sides of the argument makes his future progress hard to predict – not least by the man himself. "The problem is, I don't know where to go next," he says. "I never like the idea of doing the same movie twice. Maybe now I owe it to myself to do something which doesn't rely on spontaneity and the magic of the moment, something cinematically defined and perceived. So part of me wants to continue exploring that sense of realism, and part of me wants to run in the opposite direction." **S**

 *Starred Up* is released on 21 March and is reviewed on page 84



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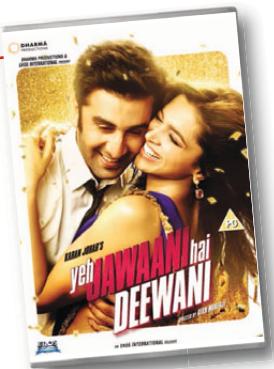
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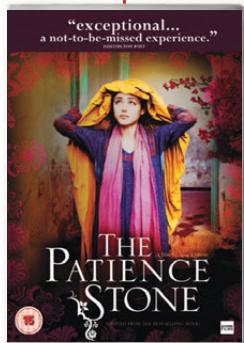
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BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE (3)



AGE OF INNOCENCE

Cinema's fascination with childhood is as old as the medium itself, enabling filmmakers to depart from conventional modes of storytelling as they exploit an adult awareness to reflect the undoubted otherness of youthful experience

By Pasquale Iannone

The recent death of 1930s child star Shirley Temple has brought to mind once again the long symbiotic relationship between childhood and the cinema, a relationship that stretches back to 1895 and one of the first home movies, Louis Lumière's *Baby's Breakfast* (*Le Repas de bébé*). The film, only 41 seconds long, observes Lumière's brother Auguste and sister-in-law Marguerite as they enjoy breakfast with infant daughter Andrée in the garden of the family home, the trees rustling gently behind them. Little Andrée is fed a few spoonfuls by her father, who then hands her a biscuit. She inspects the biscuit before stretching out her hand to her uncle off screen. "Why don't you have it – it's for you," her father seems to say as he pours her a little more milk, and the film ends. This early cinematic snapshot of childhood was made by a filmmaker who was nonetheless rigidly 'adult' in the approach to his material. Lumière's seemingly off-the-cuff execution belied the precision and calculation behind every shot. *Baby's Breakfast* is very much an adult view of childhood, but to find the first filmmaker who captures the wonder, the freedom, the playfulness of childhood, we need only look to Lumière's contemporary Georges Méliès.

Coming from a background in magic, theatre and spectacle, Méliès's relationship with the cinematograph was like that of a child staring open-mouthed at a bundle of new toys on Christmas morning. (As Orson Welles later said, cinema was "the biggest electric train set any boy ever had".) Méliès made use of all of the effects at his disposal to craft elaborate fantasy and trick films. In films such as *A Trip to the Moon* (1902), for instance, we see – in admittedly primitive form – a sort of childhood from the inside out, as opposed to childhood from the outside in *Baby's Breakfast*.

Looking back at the vast quantity of films about the subject made since those early days, it's clear that the best childhood pictures are those that have found ways

to harness both methods, films that manage to approach childhood with adult acuity while in some way reflecting its undoubted otherness. The presence of a child often allows filmmakers to depart from conventional modes of storytelling, to wriggle free from the strict demands of plot. We see this in works as diverse as *The Night of the Hunter* (Charles Laughton, 1955) or *Ratcatcher* (Lynne Ramsay, 1999), *Chickamauga* (Robert Enrico, 1962) or *Fanny and Alexander* (Ingmar Bergman, 1982). When young siblings Pearl (Sally Jane Bruce) and John Harper (Billy Chapin) escape the clutches of the homicidal preacher Harry Powell (Robert Mitchum) in *The Night of the Hunter*, Laughton's camera follows the children as their boat glides slowly along the Ohio river. The pulsing drama of the chase fades away and the film slips into the realm of fairy tale. While John is slumped over, exhausted, his sister sings a haunting lullaby about a fly whose "two pretty children flew away, flew away, into the sky, into the moon". Laughton then cuts from the boat to the riverbank; a cobweb stretches across the frame with the children gliding along in the background.

Some of the evocative imagery in *The Night of the Hunter* (children and water, the child seen through a cobweb) resurfaces in *Ivan's Childhood* (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1962), a film that belongs to an ever-growing canon of pictures about children's wartime experience. Usually, directors use the figure of the child to amplify the horror of war but Tarkovsky goes further. Like Laughton, he wants to capture a sense of the child's outer and inner world. Czech New Wave filmmaker Jan Němec did the same – albeit in more experimental fashion – with his 1964 film *Diamonds of the Night*, a feverish tale of two teenage boys who escape from a train bound for a concentration camp and are haunted by visions brought on by fear and hunger. The violent shattering of innocence during wartime is a chance for the filmmaker to point the finger at the adult world – think of the

KIDS STAY IN THE PICTURE
(Clockwise from above)
Andrei Tarkovsky's *Mirror*,
Louis Lumière's *Baby's Breakfast* and Peter Weir's
Witness



 *j'accuse* of Germany Year Zero (Roberto Rossellini, 1948). Films about childhood often show the child forced into premature adulthood and in no film is this more terrifyingly depicted than in *Come and See* (Elem Klimov, 1985). Over the course of its 136 minutes, we see teenager Flor (Alexei Kravchenko) physically and mentally transformed by the brutality he's forced to witness. Klimov's purposely relentless approach leaves very little space for dream or fantasy. Who can forget the close-ups of Flor toward the end of the film – bruised, traumatised, prematurely aged, left alive purely by chance.

If we were to place Klimov's depiction of childhood at one end of a very wide spectrum, at the other end we would find Shirley Temple. While the likes of Ivan and Flor are eventually beaten down by the adult world, the majority of Temple's good-humoured, enthusiastic characters are there to make grown-ups see the error of their ways.

REBELLION

Around the same time that little Shirley was singing and tap-dancing her way into audiences' affections, the idea of children 'taking over' was also the subject of *Zéro de conduite* (Jean Vigo, 1933), the story of a rebellion at an all-boys boarding school. Vigo's close identification with the rambunctious kids makes for a formally dazzling evocation of children breaking free from the constraints placed on them by adults (here depicted as grotesque figures except for Jean Dasté's Chaplinesque Monsieur Huguet).

Twenty-five years later, François Truffaut made *The 400 Blows* (1959), another picture about youthful rebellion, a theme that was carried on into Maurice Pialat's Truffaut-produced feature debut *Naked Childhood* (1968). In Pialat's film, ten-year-old François (Michel Terrazon) is moved from one foster home to another, seemingly unable to settle and becoming ever more troublesome. Pialat never explains François's antics; like the foster parents in the film, the audience is left to wonder what makes the child act the way he does.

A decade later, Pialat returned to questions of youth with *Graduate First* (1979), a follow-up of sorts to *Naked Childhood*. Similarly unsentimental in tone, the film focuses on the lives of a group of disaffected teenagers in the northern French town of Lens. Arguably Pialat's best-known work about youth, 1983's *À Nos Amours* features an extraordinary performance by Sandrine Bonnaire as a precocious 15-year-old who embarks on a string of affairs to distance herself from her dysfunctional family. Like the earlier two films, *À Nos Amours* is concerned with the capriciousness and unpredictability of youth – themes reflected in Pialat's unsweetened approach. Saccharine depictions are, of course, the main problem when it comes to childhood and the cinema, and while it's a criticism that certainly can't be levelled at Pialat, it remains all too common.

LOSS

Italian director Luigi Comencini made several films featuring child protagonists. *Misunderstood* (1967) stars Anthony Quayle as a recently widowed English diplomat in Florence who fails to understand that his eight-year-old son's wayward behaviour is part of the boy's grieving process. Set during World War II, René Clément's *For-*



Vigo's close identification with the kids in 'Zéro de conduite' makes for a formally dazzling evocation of children breaking free from adult constraints



YOUNG SOUL REBELS
(From top) The youthful protagonists of François Truffaut's *The 400 Blows*, Jean Vigo's *Zéro de conduite* and Maurice Pialat's *Naked Childhood* are all trying to liberate themselves from the strait-jacket of adult rules

bidden Games (1952) tells of Paulette (Brigitte Fossey), a five-year-old girl who is orphaned by an aerial bombardment. She ends up at a farm and becomes friends with the farmowner's son, 12-year-old Michel (Georges Poujouly) who helps her build a cemetery for small animals. Clément presents this as an episode of post-traumatic play, an attempt by Paulette to start to come to terms with her loss.

Given their subject matter, both *Misunderstood* and *Forbidden Games* can, of course, be forgiven for their sentimentality, but a film such as Carlos Saura's *Cría Cuervos* (1976) shows an alternative way of depicting loss. Rather than follow the linear structure of Comencini and Clément, Saura's film is fragmented and riddled with gaps—a closer reflection of true childhood experience, especially when faced with trauma. When eight-year-old Ana (Ana Torrent) discovers her father dead in his bedroom after an apparent heart attack, she is convinced she has poisoned him. She then sees her mother in the kitchen, only for Saura to reveal that Ana's mother had in fact died some time before. Unable to fully grasp what has happened to the family and having now to deal with an authoritarian aunt, Ana's subjectivity is relayed through a narrative that blends past and present, fantasy and reality.

Cría Cuervos is the second of Torrent's two exceptional childhood performances of the 1970s. Made three years earlier, Victor Erice's *The Spirit of the Beehive* (1973) employs a similar structure, only this time the story—set in a Castilian village in 1940—is about the impact of cinema on an impressionable young mind, how a young child deals with images she is perhaps not quite ready for. This leads us to consider a group of films that are concerned with the child as a witness, witness not necessarily to horrors of the magnitude of *Come and See*, but to events that nonetheless place them in a dangerous position.

WITNESS

There are, of course, countless films that feature the child as witness to criminality. Such scenes are often presented as flashbacks to explain the motivation behind the action of the characters as adults. It's far more unusual to have the whole story unfold from the child's point of view. In Carol Reed's *The Fallen Idol* (1948), Phillippe (Bobby Henrey), the young son of a foreign ambassador in London, becomes embroiled in a secret concerning the family butler, Baines (Ralph Richardson). Adapted by Graham Greene from his story 'The Basement Room', it's a film in which the tension—as Vicky Lebeau says in her book *Childhood and Cinema*—is dependent on the fallibility of the child's perception. Reed—who also featured child protagonists in later works such as *A Kid for Two Farthings* (1955) and *Oliver!* (1968)—makes sure that many of the key events in the picture are seen from Phillippe's perspective. The chiaroscuro deep-focus compositions that Reed would take to new levels with *The Third Man* (1949) are already very much in evidence.

Made in the US a year after *The Fallen Idol*, Ted Tetzlaff's *The Window* (1949) is another suspenseful film on the theme. A world away from Phillippe's privileged upbringing, we find little Tommy (Bobby Driscoll), the son of working class parents living in a crowded New York tenement. Bobby has a habit of crying wolf, so when he appears to have witnessed a murder late one balmy summer night, there are very few adults willing to



CHILD'S EYE VIEW
(Clockwise from above)
Carlos Saura's *Cría Cuervos*,
Victor Erice's *Spirit of the Beehive*, Carol Reed's *Fallen Idol* and Ted Tetzlaff's *The Window* all explore the idea of children being witnesses to an adult world they can't yet understand



 believe him. Tetzlaff made his name as a cinematographer in the 30s and 40s and shot Alfred Hitchcock's *Notorious* (1946) before adapting *The Window* from a Cornell Woolrich story. Interestingly, Woolrich would also provide the source material for Hitchcock's famous film on adult voyeurism, *Rear Window* (1954).

At the beginning of Peter Weir's *Witness* (1985), eight-year-old Amish boy Samuel (Lukas Haas) witnesses a murder in the toilet of a Philadelphia train station. Like *The Fallen Idol* and *The Window*, Weir's framing and shot composition emphasises the child's limited perspective. As the film progresses, Samuel's viewpoint alternates with that of the film's adult protagonist, John Book (Harrison Ford), the detective who has been assigned to work on the case.

MEMORY

Rather than focus on the child's act of looking, some of the most affecting pictures on childhood have filmmakers themselves looking back at their youth. Dealing as they do with memory, these works tend to deviate most from traditional narrative structures – think again of Tarkovsky, of Federico Fellini, the films of Terence Davies and Jane Campion, or indeed Claire Denis's *Chocolat* (1988).

Fellini drew on childhood memories for many of his films, but children are most prominent in films such as *8½* (1963), *Roma* (1972) and *Amarcord* (1973). In his 1980 memoir *Fare un Film*, Fellini notes: "For children, everything is fantastical because it is unknown, unseen, never tested, the world presents itself to the child without intentions... It's a huge, marvellous free spectacle, a kind of boundless, breathing amoeba where everything lives, subject and object, confused in one incessant flux." It's a passage that perfectly captures not only Fellini's vision of childhood, but also his approach to filmmaking, placing him firmly in the Méliès tradition. In the films of Fellini, memories are not clearly detached from a linear narrative but form part of a free-flowing stream of images as in Saura's *Cria Cuervos* and Tarkovsky's film-poem *Mirror*.

When Tarkovsky started thinking about the structure of *Mirror* (1974), he came upon the idea of blending childhood memories with contemporary documentary footage (an interview with his mother) – the two perspectives would then be alternated in the final cut. Ultimately, he



For children, everything is fantastical because it is unknown, unseen, never tested... everything lives, subject and object, confused in one incessant flux

CITY OF LOST CHILDREN
Jack Clayton's *Our Mother's House* and Hirokazu Kore-eda's *Nobody Knows* (below) explore what happens when children are left alone and there are no longer any rules to break



felt such an approach would feel too studied ("Artificial and monotonous like a game of ping-pong," he writes in *Sculpting in Time*). So out went the more 'adult' approach and in came the freer, more associative style.

THE CHILD LEFT ALONE

Having talked about the tension, the push and pull between the worlds of adult and child, what happens when the child is left alone, when there are no rules left to break? In Jack Clayton's *Our Mother's House* (1967), a family of seven children decides not to report their mother's death from illness for fear of being sent to an orphanage. Instead, they bury their mother in the garden of their large family home and continue life as normal. Clayton charts the full gamut of childhood emotion – carefree and playful one minute, unforgivingly cruel the next – in what remains one of the most sorely underappreciated portraits of the vicissitudes of childhood.

Hirokazu Kore-eda's *Nobody Knows* (2004) is also about children left alone. Like *Our Mother's House*, adult-less freedom and adventure is counterbalanced by a palpable sense of unease. Kore-eda's is an intimate, synaesthetic approach with the camera, alive to the small details of the children's lives, much like Korean-American filmmaker So Yong Kim in *Treeless Mountain* (2008). In this film, Kim's second feature, two young girls (aged six and four) are left with their aunt as their mother sets off to find their estranged father.

Together with works such as Samira Makhmalbaf's incredible debut *The Apple* (1998), the films of Kore-eda and Kim show that to understand the child through film, we don't always need the restless spatio-temporal flow of Fellini or Tarkovsky – there are kids' movies that are brilliantly effective at simply watching children be. While it's certainly true that more formally daring work can reflect a child's inner world, Mark Cousins is right when he notes near the beginning of *A Story of Children and Film*, "Art shows us again and again that if we look closely, openly at a small thing, we can see lots in it." 

A season of 17 films curated by Mark Cousins, 'Cinema of Childhood', will launch on 11 April at Filmhouse in Edinburgh, BFI Southbank in London and other key venues across the UK. Cousins's documentary *A Story of Children and Film* is released on 4 April and is reviewed on page 85

SONGS OF FREEDOM

Mark Cousins seized the chance to take liberties with form in his essay film 'A Story of Children and Film', an examination of the notion that kids' movies are all about freedom

Interview by Pasquale Iannone

PI: You've embraced the essay form in a big way over the past few years with *A Story of Children and Film*, *What Is This Film Called Love?* and *Here Be Dragons*. You've also written a manifesto on the essay film and, looking through it, what strikes me is this sense of looseness, of freedom that the form can give you. I was wondering if there was any filmmaker who has influenced you in particular?

MC: It's funny but when it comes to the essay film, it's writers who have influenced me more. The essays of Virginia Woolf, for instance; everyone talks about Montaigne, and quite rightly, his writing's still so fresh; Rousseau's *Confessions*. But a film like Godard's *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* [1967], the idea that a film can be about two parallel tracks: about a woman and a city, about urbanism and gender and the sparks that fly between those – it's fantastic. I particularly like heterodox filmmakers, those who put several apparently unrelated things in one film. For some reason I've been less influenced by the 8mm filmmakers, who have been filming their own lives for many years. It's because they are impressionists; they're more like Monet whereas my style – and I can't believe I'm saying this – is more like Paul Cézanne. Cézanne did his thinking as he painted whereas an impressionist does their thinking afterwards.

PI: *A Story of Children and Film* doesn't present a chronological history of childhood and cinema. The film's based around a series of themes – shyness, class, the strop, storytelling, parenting et cetera – but it all starts with you observing your niece and nephew Laura and Ben playing in your flat.

MC: Yes, I had just come out of *A Story of Film* where I had to stick to the truth, a kind of through-line, so I just wanted to do something more free, and as I started thinking about children and cinema I started to realise that what interested me about kids' movies wasn't that the films were about kids. Kids' movies are about freedom. When you think about it, children are probably the least free people in the world. Somebody tells them when to eat their dinner, to change their trousers because that doesn't go, and when to go to bed – they're little slaves. All films



The child within: Mark Cousins

Children are probably some of the least free people in the world. Somebody tells them when to eat their dinner, when to go to bed. They're little slaves

about children are in some way playing with the idea of breaking out of that enslavement, so the theme of *A Story of Children and Film* in a way is freedom and I needed a free and loose form to make it work. At first, people who were backing the film were a little scared that there was no spine to it, no solid structure, that it wasn't didactic. The concern was, "Well, is it going to be this little tonal thing?" and the answer was, "Well, yes." But it's not abstract in any way; it goes to particular places and moments. There's factual stuff in there but it enjoys the kind of liberty that the kids in children's films enjoy.

PI: In the film, you unearth an extraordinary range of very rarely seen films alongside more familiar titles such as *Kes* [1969], *The 400 Blows* [1959] and *E.T.* [1982]. How did you go about finding these lesser-known films?

MC: I knew a lot of them already, especially

the Iranian stuff – I've been banging the drum for Mohamed-Ali Talebi for the longest time (see Dispatches, page 13). Then I hooked up with Neil McGlone, who's really knowledgeable about cinema and he sent me a couple of titles, including the Karel Kachyna film *Long Live the Republic* [1965], which is fantastic. Then I just asked around. I asked my producer in Sweden, Anita Oxburgh, about the best Swedish film about children and she said *Hugo and Josephine* [Kjell Grede, 1967] – it's just so brilliantly grown up about the relationship between children and adults. I asked Karel Och, who's the artistic director of the Karlovy Vary Film Festival, if he knew of any Czech films that maybe we had missed and he sent me Miroslav Janek's *The Unseen* [1996] and I was just blown away by it.

PI: A recurring image in the films you discuss is the balloon – it's such a powerful, vivid symbol of childhood.

MC: One of the things you see children do most is play with balloons. Something that is so cheap and so everywhere should be banal and yet there remains something almost mystical about them. They're so cinematic too – that's why there are loads of them in *A Story of Children and Film*.



E.T. the Extra-terrestrial



Hugo and Josephine

ME, MYSELF

A man is haunted by his doppelganger in Richard Ayoade's 'Submarine' follow-up, 'The Double', which sees the director expand his filmic vocabulary in a black comedy of anxiety and urban paranoia, loosely adapted from Dostoevsky's novella

By David Thompson



Richard Ayoade has done well by *Sight & Sound* – he was the cover boy of the November 2010 issue, and when his first feature *Submarine* was released the following year, it was 'Film of the Month'. Praise indeed for a director still in his early thirties whose background was the Cambridge Footlights, the quirkier corners of television comedy (*Garth Marenghi's Darkplace*, *The IT Crowd*) and indie rock videos (Arctic Monkeys, Vampire Weekend).

Submarine, a coming-of-age story set in 1980s Swansea, announced a talent completely at ease with the modern language of cinema – and one also highly astute at avoiding romcom clichés. He clearly has a closer affinity to the Andersons (Wes and Paul T) across the pond than to any school of British naturalism or the whimsy of Curtis-land – not to mention an intense seriousness in how he discusses his work. In his second feature, *The Double*, Ayoade has developed his filmic vocabulary even further by creating a wholly imagined nightmare world, with the comedy this time drawn from a dark well of paranoia and urban anxiety.

The Double is loosely derived from the novella by Fyodor Dostoevsky, originally written in 1846 (but revised 20 years later), in which a neurotic government clerk, Golyadkin, finds himself haunted by his exact

double in name and features, an imposter who looks set to achieve all the success that eludes him. Eventually Golyadkin's life becomes so tortured and his efforts to climb the social ladder so disastrous that he undergoes a severe mental collapse. *The Double* was the basis of Bernardo Bertolucci's *Partner* (1968), in which Pierre Clémenti's struggles with bourgeois society were seen through the prism of student radicalism (it was shot in Rome during the May '68 riots in Paris). More recently, Roman Polanski planned to turn the story into a contemporary comedy starring John Travolta, but for reasons that still remain unclear the American actor walked off the production just before shooting was about to start in 1996, and the film was abandoned.

Ayoade's version is even further removed from the social world of mid-19th century imperialist Russia. A first version of the screenplay was written by Avi Korine (the quieter brother of Harmony) before *Submarine* was made, and writer and director were put together by the film's producers, and began exchanging drafts over the following years (Ayoade earned himself a co-writing credit). The director confesses that at first he had no deep knowledge of Dostoevsky, only having read *Crime and Punishment* up to that point.

TWO'S COMPANY
Jesse Eisenberg (above, and with Mia Wasikowska as Hannah, above right) plays both the socially inept Simon James and the suave, charismatic James Simon in *The Double*, directed by Richard Ayoade (overleaf)

AND HIM



The Double is quite a difficult book in many respects,” he says. “It has that feeling of slipping in and out of telling you things and being inside Golyadkin’s head, and location shifts occur within a sentence – it’s very discombobulating. And you have no real way of knowing what’s actually happening. The most interesting thing about it was the premise that an exact replica of you could appear and not only would no one notice, but after you point out the identical nature of this other person, no one else is bothered. That seemed very funny, a brilliant idea, and not following the general Gothic tradition of doubles that you find in a Dorian Gray decay, or a William Wilson frightening shadow [in Edgar Allan Poe’s eponymous short story]. Just something very deadpan and Kafka – though obviously it precedes Kafka.”

The opening scene of Ayoade’s film takes place on what resembles a New York subway train, maybe in the 1950s, but there are no specific details to inform you that is the case. “In Avi’s first draft, it was an indistinct metropolis, but probably it would have been bigger and like New York or Chicago,” he says, “whereas it became more European, and more Finnish, like an Aki Kaurismäki world. Another thing I had in mind was Jean-Pierre Melville and *Army of Shadows* [1969], which was obviously meant to

be set in wartime but had something more abstract and fable-like to it, with something impossible about the colours that adds to it rather than takes away. Because there’s a mythological underpinning to a doppelganger story – we’re not suggesting this is a true story. There is a fairytale element to it, but at the same time we don’t want to be saying, ‘Once upon a time on the sixth of April in Wrexham!’ That specificity isn’t of help to the narrative.”

Of course, an audience needs to align itself in some way to the material, he points out. “Inevitably, because of the photographic quality of film, a door looks exactly like a door, and with that kind of verisimilitude it can be hard, because immediately when you’re shown something you want to orientate yourself in some way. So you have to fight against that and almost say, ‘OK, this is sort of what you’ve seen before so you don’t have to wonder whether you’re in space or not.’” But there are clues: there are no signs, for instance. “David Crank, the production designer, worked on *There Will Be Blood*, and there are no signs in that film, which is interesting. The other thing we discussed is how, in Edward Hopper’s paintings, there are telegraph poles but we don’t see the lines between them, though we don’t think of them not being there. You just show enough to evoke something.”

There is a fairytale element to the film, but we don’t want to be saying, ‘Once upon a time on the sixth of April in Wrexham!’ That specificity doesn’t help



That was the idea, to simplify, not to have too much clutter, and not to go for a version of a big city swarming with people like in King Vidor's *The Crowd*. Also it's mostly set at night, and there's something appropriate to this as a night-time story."

For *The Double*, shot mainly in an improvised studio in London, Ayoade has assembled a brilliant cast that mixes US actors such as Wallace Shawn and Cathy Moriarty with some faces familiar from *Submarine*, including Noah Taylor and Yasmin Paige. The lead roles are both played by Jesse Eisenberg, ineffably persuasive as the socially inept Simon James, who over-complicates the smallest of small talk, and his suavely seductive double, James Simon. As a guide, Ayoade gave Eisenberg two strikingly different films to watch: Orson Welles's *The Trial* and Robert Bresson's *A Man Escaped*, in which the acting styles would appear to be diametrically opposed.

"The first scene in *The Trial* is my favourite in all of Orson Welles's films," Ayoade says. "That energy is something we wanted. But it's also a kind of stillness that exists in the characters in Bresson films that I was interested in. I often think – and this isn't true of Jesse – that actors have to tell you what a scene means, because it doesn't quite make sense to them, there isn't a good reason for them to be angry so they have to get angry for you to go, 'Why, he's really angry!' Whereas if the scene works or if it plays right, you don't have to play the anger. Jesse really wanted to feel what that character was feeling, but I suppose it's not giving him the same expressivity that Jesse naturally has. You have to have the actor still feel the emotions, but almost contain their natural expressivity."

BALANCING ACT

As in *Submarine*, the female object of desire – Hannah, played by Mia Wasikowska in a role significantly amplified compared with her counterpart in Dostoevsky – has her own preoccupations and feelings given space in the film. "If both *Submarine* and *The Double* have a male gaze at their centre," Ayoade says, "then that gaze is egotistical and subjective and not necessarily concerned about what a female character is concerned about, and part of their estrangement from the world is not being able to empathise or understand those characters. And the danger is that it looks as if you are creating a character who isn't rounded. It's the Betsy problem in *Taxi Driver*: is that character not fleshed out, or is it that the protagonist cannot see any depth or different sides to her? It's a balancing act, in that you want to write it as though you could have filmed it from their point of view and you know what that would be, but we're going to show it from a myopic point of view. Hopefully, if you find the main character interesting enough, then what they find interesting in another character won't just be clichés. You end up searching for behavioural insights into an inner life that you might not be able fully to see, such as how she would have got there, how she would have lived there, what she wanted to see – those kind of things."

Also evident in both his films is Ayoade's overt cinephilia, which in *Submarine* took the form of blatant homages to the French New Wave. "I started watching a lot of films late, probably at 16 and 17, and then saw a French New Wave season on BBC2," Ayoade recalls. "If you get into them, their influences were everything that came before, so you head off in that direction. Also that was



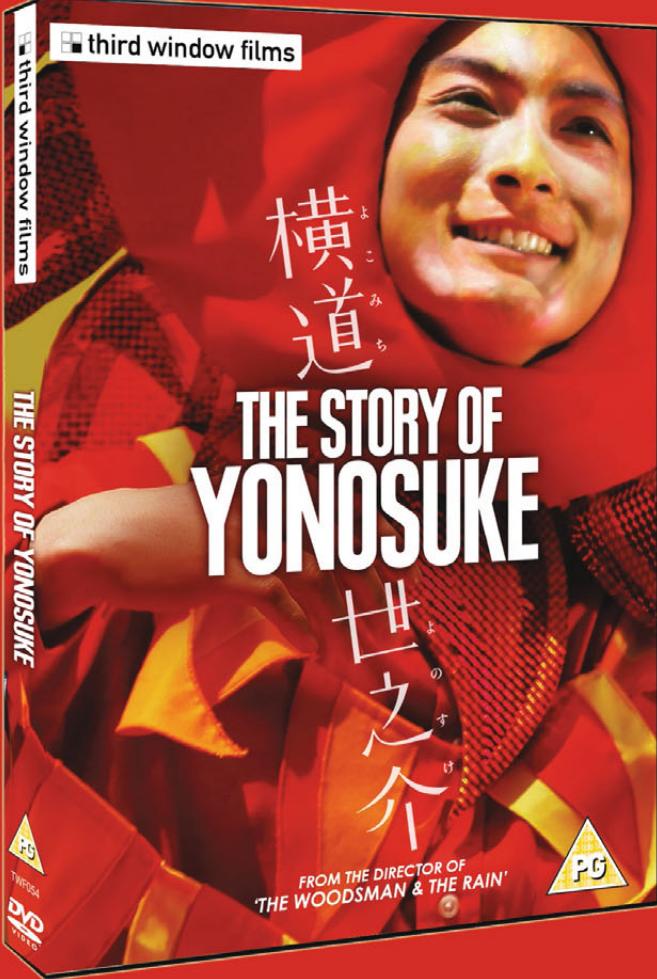
There's a stillness in the characters in Bresson films that I was interested in. You have to have the actor feel the emotions, but almost contain their natural expressivity

when Quentin Tarantino appeared, and that was a big thing, because aside from whether you liked his films or not, there was something infectious about how omnivorous he was and the films that he liked. The French New Wave seemed to point me in two directions, one being Hawks, Hitchcock and Welles, and the other the contemporary American directors I like – Scorsese, Coppola, Bogdanovich – because they in turn were influenced by the French. And Paul Thomas Anderson really likes Truffaut, so it all seemed linked. It was similar to reading J.D. Salinger and then getting into Sherwood Anderson – you follow things up."

The obvious reference for the oppressive world of *The Double* would appear to be Terry Gilliam's *Brazil*, with its weirdly retrospective view on the construction of future technologies and environments. But Ayoade feels his influences lie chiefly elsewhere. "To me it's more like Roy Andersson, but he doesn't suggest an adjective that can be applied usefully in an article – though possibly in *Sight & Sound* you can get away with it!" he says. "They're brilliant films. I've been reading George Saunders, who you would probably call an American humorist writer of contemporary stories – dystopian, a bit like Richard Brautigan but pushed further – and they really remind me of Roy Andersson in a strange way. So I can imagine an American version of a Roy Andersson world..."

He stops himself, aware what really sells a film. "The elephant in the room is that you're in a context of commerce, and people are saying, 'Should I bother to see this? What is it roughly like?' When people say David O. Russell is like Scorsese, in my book superficially his films have got nothing to do with Scorsese. Scorsese seems to have a completely different set of interests, like genuine redemption or sin, which don't seem to me preoccupations of Russell's. But in the end, it is a medium of surfaces and production design." **S**

i *The Double* is released in the UK on 4 April and is reviewed on page 70



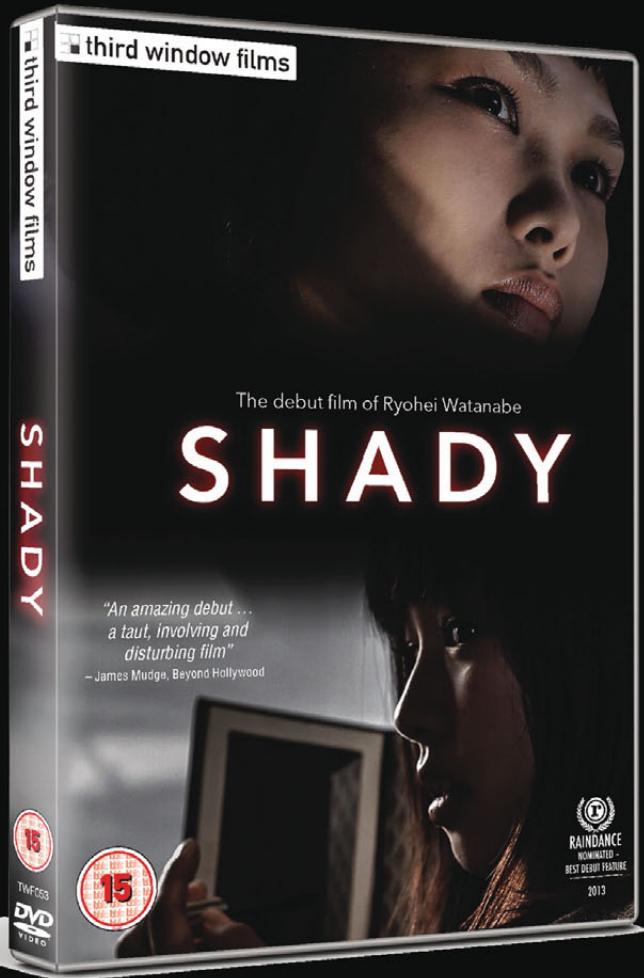
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JEREMY THOMAS



PART 1 THE MAKING OF A SUPER-PRODUCER

In a career spanning more than 40 years, Jeremy Thomas has been the engine behind an extraordinarily diverse range of films, from Skolimowski's *The Shout* to Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor* to Jarmusch's *Only Lovers Left Alive*. The son of *Doctor in the House* director Ralph Thomas and the nephew of Gerald Thomas, the man behind the *Carry On...* films, Jeremy grew up at the heart of the British film scene of the 1950s and 60s, cutting his teeth on work with Ken Loach and Ray Harryhausen. Here, he reminisces about his childhood hanging out with Sid James, making films at Dirk Bogarde's house and going ten-pin bowling with John Hurt. **Interview by Nick James**

Jeremy Thomas: When does a person's memory begin? It's cloudy for me as to when my first really dated memory is, but the first really significant memories are going to lunch at the Pinewood restaurant. This was a huge restaurant in the middle [of the studios]. In a room off it would be Cecil Beaton, taking photographs of the biggest stars of the day. The restaurant was serviced by uniformed waiters with a full *à la carte* menu and everybody in their costumes – from Richard Burton and Liz Taylor to members of the *Carry On* team dressed as Indians – were having lunch with the directors, and Hitchcock would be sitting there. It was beyond belief for a child to be having plaice, chips and peas looking at this. The Pinewood restaurant is a metaphor for me for the film business. A certain standard was expected because there were so many well-known actors and directors. Today it's an empty room that's occasionally used for a party and which you walk through on your way to the bar – it's got the panelling from the [1907-built ocean liner] *Mauretania*.

Nick James: As a child, I suppose the thing that you're reacting to at first is the costumes.

JT: There were people working on my father's films and people working on my uncle's films. My father was making a film called *The Iron Petticoat* [1956]. Katharine Hepburn used to come and stay at our house. We would go to pond on the common and she would flip stones in her twill trousers and her suede blouson. There were the *Doctor* films and the *Carry On* films. I remember particularly *Carry On Sergeant*, because I was allowed to play in the assault course with my sister Jill. I was given free rein to run around with a bicycle going to these incredible stages. I can remember all these people hanging off ropes on

this model of the Titanic [from 1958's *A Night to Remember*]. I remember *Cleopatra* [1963] too.

NJ: Were there particular people of whom you were fondest?

JT: I was very fond of my father's DP, Ernie Steward. He had Alfred Roome, the editor, and there was a designer [probably Carmen Dillon], a target group of people who used to come to the house because he was making three films a year. I grew up in a lavish house that was like a Beverly Hills house: swimming pool, tennis court et cetera.

NJ: What was your earliest memory of watching a film?

JT: I remember watching films on 16mm at the house, and it was always very exciting and the thing would go wrong, it would spin out of control and there would be film all over the living room. Then I was given a camera and I was allowed to go and make films with my sister

at Dirk Bogarde's house, who lived just round the corner. He lived in a place called Drummers Yard, a large, beautiful house which had a cinema in it. Even today, if you look at it from the road, it's like a castle. Dirk lived there with [actor] Tony Forwood and Tony's son, Gareth. I was the guy with the Bell & Howell 16mm wind-up camera with a turret on it. I was very lucky to have such a thing and my dad would take the film to be processed at the studio. Dirk would help with the props. If we were doing a fishmonger scene, he'd go down the drive in his Rolls and bring back some mackerel.

There were film stars in our house. Brigitte Bardot was there. Our house had a large staircase and you could look down to the hall. My sister and I would be up there in our pyjamas looking to see who was coming in. You'd see James Robertson Justice coming out of his gull-wing Mercedes. I didn't know what to look at, him or the Mercedes. The *Carry On* team were at my uncle's house. I was very friendly with Sid James, Kenny Williams, Joan Sims and Hattie Jacques. I knew most of them from before I had memory.

In those days they couldn't get enough movies made. Rank's problem was, "How can we ramp up production more?" The studio was buzzing in work, with a camera department and a prop department and a budgeting department and a sound department and a directors' department and editorial and a writers' department and an executive producer Earl St. John over it all. They had trucks that went off to Europe, brute-like arc lights that we'd ship to India to shoot the Taj Mahal. You'd go into the camera department and there were 50 cameras. You'd go into the prop department and there was everything you could have imagined.



Following in father's footsteps: Ralph Thomas





 **NJ: Is there any one film from that time that somehow encapsulates your childhood for you?**

JT: I suppose *The Wild and the Willing* [1962] because I was 13 years old and I could interact with John Hurt. He had been cast by my father from RADA and I was able to go to the set. I became friendly with John and I still am. He's only eight or nine years older than me and that shared memory of this boy who was doing ten-pin bowling with him in Uxbridge has remained today.

NJ: When did you first experience the London side of the industry?

JT: I had some friends in London because I went to boarding school from a young age, and at Millfield we had a film society and I was active in the film group. I really didn't like school. I was more interested in looking out the window. I got a few 'O' levels and left at 17. I wanted to get out and get into the world, so I went with a friend in a little car around Europe and Morocco and then I came back and wanted to go to work. So my dad got me a job in the Rank laboratories in Denham, which was very sought after. The film business in those days was a closed shop. You had to get a union card to get in. The only way you could get a union card was by being a trainee in the labs.

NJ: What did that entail?

JT: Labelling cans and later working in numbering rooms, cutting rooms and sometimes the darkroom, which was more responsible.

NJ: Did they tease you because of your connections?

JT: A little. I managed to get by. It was an awkward situation. I behaved intelligently modest and somehow got through. Then I got a job in the cutting room. Fred Chandler, who was a great lab man, gave me a gig in a post-production trailer facility and I did a little bit of work. Then I got my full union card.

NJ: What were you cutting?

JT: Trailers for [TV series] *The Saint*, working on a pic sync and doing what I was told – "We want ten frames of that" – getting a rough idea of what it meant to put two shots together. Meanwhile I moved to London because I had a job on a film called *The Ballad of Tam Lin* [AKA *The Devil's Widow*, 1970], directed by Roddy McDowall, starring Ava Gardner and produced by Alan Ladd Jr and Stanley Mann. I was a junior assistant, numbering rushes and wrapping up trims for John Victor-Smith, the editor of *The Road to Hong Kong* and Dick Lester's films. Great editor, the editor I chose to edit my film when I directed a film although he was 70. He was the guy who gave me my break. I was allowed to hang on to the outside of the group, showing the rushes to Ava Gardner, hearing her talk about them – it was like an induction.

Then I went to work on *The Harder They Come* [1972]. I met Chris Blackwell, understood reggae, loved that music – and that film really broke that music in the world. It was all very friendly and Chris Blackwell became this influence in the way that he'd subconsciously managed to commercialise what he loved into some sort of business by doing music that he felt would be bridging originality and crossover.

Then I went to work with Roy Watts, who was



Silent witness: Sid James (left) and Katharine Hepburn in Ralph Thomas's *The Iron Petticoat* (1956)

Ken Loach's editor, and I worked on *The Rank and File* [for the BBC's *Play for Today* in 1971], which was a Jim Allen play, in cutting rooms in Wardour Street opposite Gerrard Street.

NJ: Do you have particular stories from that time that stand out?

JT: One of my attributes as a producer is that I find it pleasant and easy to interact with people, and every older person likes to have younger people around who are able to assimilate with them. I had that skill, and so I was allowed in. Of course it may be that I was more advanced in cinema culture because I grew up in it, it may be because I was dressed in Carnaby Street clothes – already at school I was allowed up into Carnaby Street

We grew up with a patriarch. He was a very approachable father but everybody was doing what he wanted to happen

to buy button-down collars and flashy clothes. I suppose one of the reasons why it opened up is that I was the son of a film director who made so many movies and who brought so much different culture into the house. I had a childhood already full of films being made in front of me.

NJ: One gets the impression that he was both loving and militaristic.

JT: A film director is a film director, used to meeting hundreds of people at their whim. "I'll do it like that. Oh no, I've changed my mind, I think we're going to do it like that," and everybody obeyed. We were in a house with a patriarch, who was very quietly spoken and carried a lot of weight. He was a very approachable father, never got angry but everybody was doing what he wanted to happen. This is a house with staff, by the way – with meal times. If you didn't eat at meal times, you didn't eat. As Alexander Walker described it, it was "Hollywood England". There was a lot of people living in that area around Pinewood, Denham and Shepperton – not only



Carry on smiling: Jeremy Thomas with his uncle, the director Gerald Thomas

the British filmmakers but also the Americans because, after [the] McCarthy [hearings], a lot of filmmakers chose to live in the UK.

I worked on lots of films because you would work around the studios and get two days here, two days there. You'd finish your job at Pinewood, drive to Elstree, go to see the manager of the cutting-room block and get three or four days on a Sam Peckinpah film numbering the rushes, make your 20 quid, then that job would run out. Then you'd go out to Shepperton, go see the cutting-room manager. "Yeah, come in." "I've got my union card." "Yes, you can do this, that and the other." And so it went for me.

Then I became an assistant editor, learning more about the film, working with Roy Watts for a year on Ray Harryhausen's *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad*. I was allowed in with him doing the work – I made the plates for him. I was the link between him and the movie in the cutting rooms. That was a fantastic job that gave me a lot of technical knowledge in terms of the internals of making a film. The industry had an analogue complexity then, a need for a certain masterly approach, whereas today it's a different skill medium, that of a super-geek on a computer to do the same thing as hundreds of people in the darkroom.

The Golden Voyage of Sinbad [1973] was shot in Goldhawk Studios in Goldhawk Road, in the basement. There I met this great American producer, Charles H. Schneer, who produced all those films for Harryhausen and he was influential on me. One day I was working in the cutting rooms and I got a call: "Mr Schneer wants to see you." So I went up to Fitzhardinge House in Portman Square and waited outside his office. He had an American accent and he was dressed like an American producer – not chomping a cigar literally, but he would have been chomping a cigar if it wasn't that he didn't smoke. He said, "Jeremy, I've got something very serious to talk to you about." I said, "What's that, Charles?" I was terrified. He said, "I got your petty-cash vouchers and I've got to teach you a lesson. I never want to see you buying staples, rubber bands or pencils from WHSmith individually – I've got a deal with the company." I said, "Charles, it was only about five pence." "No, you've got to understand that every penny is a penny in a movie and I take care of every penny, including every petty-cash voucher."

NJ: Tell me about your time with Ken Loach.

JT: I was the boy who came from Beaconsfield and Gerrards Cross and went to a very good school, who was suddenly thrown into Ken Loach land. Ken was a wonderful man and he didn't spare me. I heard political points of view on life which were foreign to me. I was very affected by these views, so I became quietly politicised – not politicised like Ken and [his producer] Tony Garnett were, but it opened my eyes. And being affectionate towards radical politics made my journey through cinema so much easier. I got a bit of it first hand from Ken and then I went on to edit a film for him at the BBC, a one-hour Chekhov play, *A Misfortune* [1973], with Ben Kingsley.

Then I was asked to edit a film with Philippe Mora, a French-Australian artist living in London who'd made films at a very young age and who was also a well-known 60s pop art painter. He



The Harder They Come (1972)



The Golden Voyage of Sinbad (1973)

introduced me to Sandy Lieberson and David Puttnam. I was living in Bayswater but I was hanging in King's Road. I had some friends there. Mike Molloy was the [camera] operator for *A Clockwork Orange*, *Barry Lyndon*, *Performance* and *Walkabout*. He took me in to this group and I became very friendly with artists and a lot of Aussies: Richard Neville, Germaine Greer, Philippe, Martin Sharp. They were there living in The Pheasantry [an artists' colony in King's Road] and I got included in things that were going on in London in that period which were so vibrant.

NJ: But given that, how did you get any work done?

JT: Work was very pleasurable and very serious, but this was the ambience that was happening in London. I got introduced to Sandy [Lieberson] and David [Puttnam] to edit *Brother Can You Spare a Dime*, this wonderful compilation film about the [period from the] Great Crash to Pearl Harbor using films starring James Cagney, and Roosevelt's speeches and political life, as a narrative for the history of that period. It involved going to America for a year with Sandy. He was an American, from Fairfax High, had been a well-known agent who moved to Rome to head the William Morris office, then moved to London and produced *Performance*. He was like-minded to me, though older. He was an incredible teacher. He took me into places you wouldn't normally take an editor, to the homes of the Hollywood counter-culture elite. I'd been in Hollywood

as a boy and so I was equipped to deal with it. I was in my early twenties and was given free rein in America, living in an apartment in New York paid for by the film company. Philippe and I looked through all the best archives in Washington D.C., upstate New York, middle America, Los Angeles and San Francisco and the American film business got into me. When the film was completed it was accepted by Cannes for Critics' Week. So I went to Cannes for the first time as a professional – although I'd been there as an invited guest in Bernard Delfont's house.

NJ: What year was this?

JT: 1975. I stayed in a back-street hotel, got the print down there. It was a very different event than from today. The film was shown at a cinema at the side of the Majestic – I don't think it's even there any more – and it went very, very well. I came back to London and Philippe said to me, "Why don't we go to Australia?" He and I had written a couple of scripts. I was in my early twenties and I wanted to move on from being an editor. To go and make films in your early twenties was then impossible in the UK. You couldn't even point to somebody who'd done it. So I went to Australia. I was broke. My father helped me out only a couple of times but what he did give me was a letter.

So I left to go and produce and edit a film based on a book by Margaret Carnegie called *Morgan: the Bold Bushranger*. Morgan was like Ned Kelly but before him. Philippe



*Village of the damned: Thomas with John Hurt during the shoot for Jerzy Skolimowski's *The Shout* (1978)*



Brother Can You Spare a Dime (1975)



Carry on Sergeant (1958)



Mad Dog Morgan (1976)

wrote a screenplay. Margaret was of a very noble family from Australia. There was interest around to put some money in. I arrived in Australia and I had this letter, so I sent it to Sir Norman Rich, who distributed all Rank movies in Australia, including all the films that my dad made – [and] the *Carry On...* movies partially because they were so successful in Australia. So I sent this hand-written letter to Sir Norman Rich and I got a message – I was in Melbourne – “Come and see Sir Norman at his club in Hyde Park, Sidney next week.” So I had to buy a suit. Went up to Sidney from Melbourne, where I was staying in this doss, and there in the club was this old guy. It went, lunch: “And what are you doing – Daniel Morgan, the Carnegie family, yes? And what do you want? Your father said I should meet you.” “I’m going to make this film.” He said, “I tell you what. Your father made an incredible amount of money for me and he’s never been to Australia, although he’s entertained me in London many times. Why don’t you go and see the person who runs my film division tomorrow?”

In the morning I called to see John Fraser of British Empire Films in the State cinema in Sidney, a monumental cinema that doesn’t exist anymore – like the Odeon Leicester Square but ten times more beautiful. He said, “The old man said I should give you half the budget and distribute the film.” Then we got Philippe’s family in, and the Australian Film Development Corporation gave us some money so we got the budget. Then we got Dennis Hopper. At first we wanted Stacy Keach. We went to LA to see this agent, Jack Gilardi, wanting to meet Stacy Keach. “Stacy’s very successful at the moment,” says Gilardi, “and I don’t think he’ll want to play this character.”

The second on the list was Dennis Hopper, a counter-culture hero after *Easy Rider*. Dennis was *persona non grata* by this time because he had become so wild. We went to see his agent, Robert Raison, who had a beautiful house and had been Cole Porter’s lover. Lovely guy. He said, “I love this script. Dennis gets buggered in this script [there was a male rape scene]. I want you to go and see him.”

So we rented a plane to go from Albuquerque to Taos, New Mexico – we had some pre-production money. As we landed, Dennis was riding along next to the plane firing a gun in the air with his cowboy hat on. “Hey man, welcome!” By that night, we were staying in Mabel Dodge Luhan’s house with loads of young people around us and everything that you could imagine would be in Dennis Hopper’s home at that time, including being able to

see *The Last Movie* about ten times in a private screening room in a church, with everybody going “Ommm” when the good moments came.

Anyway, Dennis Hopper arrived in Australia and by nightfall he was in jail. He arrived with a Levi’s suit on, a cowboy shirt, a pair of boots and a passport, that was it. I can imagine Bob Raison just pushing him on to the plane, saying, “Just go to Australia for a bit.” It was a big thing this film – 102 speaking parts, bushrangers, carriages, guns – a baptism of fire. I’d never made a film before, knew nothing about it. The budget was done with a pencil on a piece of paper. Nobody knew anything. There were a few television cameras and a little bit of naïve expertise. We did have the brilliant Mike Molloy as DP, Philippe, and the editor John Scott. It went over budget a little bit. We were unprofessional then and we went into things that you couldn’t go into. Now you can’t do that. I don’t think we even had a completion bond. It was very amateur. Anyway the film was finished, was accepted into a sidebar event in Cannes

As we landed, Dennis Hopper was riding along next to the plane firing a gun in the air in his cowboy hat. ‘Hey man, welcome!’

that doesn’t exist anymore – the International Festival of Westerns – and it won the John Ford trophy. And then I came back to London.

NJ: Had things changed by then?

JT: When I started in the film business as a professional in the cutting rooms, I always thought that my father’s films and my uncle’s films were adored, because they were so popular and I would go to events and they were the top men. Then [along comes] New [American] Cinema, the cinema I like very much, a movement of film and filmmakers that had to bury the Rank era to progress. That’s what was going on and I realised that. Ralph’s films and Gerald’s films have been rehabilitated but there was a moment when they reached rock-bottom in terms of perception by the film industry. There were some very poor films, but they were the staple diet of the film business. That was what they were employed to do at a film factory – to make a lot of movies. By the time New Cinema came they weren’t being made under factory processes any more. They were indie movies made by independent production companies with a thought of individuals rather than of Lord Rank’s idea. ☺

i **Part two of this interview will appear in the May issue of S&S. A season of Jeremy Thomas films runs throughout April at BFI Southbank, London, and he will appear in conversation on 3 April**

Cracked actor: Dennis Hopper with Thomas on the set of *Mad Dog Morgan*



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DISCOVERY

CREATE YOUR OWN TRUTH

Cinéma-vérité pioneers and ambivalent observers of separation, Michel Brault and Pierre Perrault might be Quebec's best-kept secrets

By Jason Anderson

Its guiding principles might have been cultivated in Parisian cafés but *cinéma vérité* arguably reached its first full flowering at the snowshoe competition in Sherbrooke, Quebec. The contest was portrayed in 'Les Raquetteurs' (1958), a 15-minute short by members of the National Film Board of Canada's French-language documentary unit. The dexterity that Michel Brault – who shared directing and cinematography credits with M. Groulx – demonstrated with the then-new handheld cameras did not go unnoticed by Jean Rouch, who brought Brault first to Africa and then to Paris to shoot *Chronique d'un été* (1961).

Even at this moment of inception, the Quebecois' brand of *vérité* was distinguished by its own sensibility and nomenclature: Canadian documentarians and scholars used the phrases '*cinéma direct*' and 'candid-eye filmmaking' to differentiate it from variants in France, the US and the UK. One key element was the soundtrack for 'Les Raquetteurs', which was as daring as its camerawork: Brault and Groulx's images of

galumphing racers and chain-smoking spectators were juxtaposed with a bustling audio montage of the event's many noises and voices. Another was an avid interest in the connections between the traditions of rural Quebec, the liberalisation of wider society after decades of political and social repression, and questions about identity and autonomy that became increasingly pressing to Canada's French population in the 1960s and 70s. While it helps to know the original context for the French-Canadian filmmakers whose talents were fostered at the NFB, the fierce intelligence, stylistic audacity and visual artistry of their finest works should be readily discernible to viewers who've never been near a plate of poutine.

Brault's passing at the age of 85 in September 2013 has helped spur fresh interest in a wealth of work that remains criminally under-recognised outside of Quebec (including in English Canada, the country's 'two solitudes' typically having little interest in each other's film cultures). Like Brault, Pierre Perrault deserves greater renown outside his home province and France, where he is sufficiently revered to merit retrospectives at the Cinémathèque Française (the last was in 2012). Occasional collaborators, Perrault and Brault co-directed two of the most remarkable documentaries of *cinéma vérité*'s original era. Whether together or apart, both developed strategies that anticipated the adventurous

intermingling of documentary and ethnography favoured by Harvard's Sensory Ethnography Lab, as well as the more idiosyncratic tactics of docu-fiction mavericks such as Pedro Costa.

Canada's first-ever Cannes Competition entry, 1963's *Pour la suite du monde* is a remarkable demonstration of the intimacy and spontaneity NFB filmmakers could achieve with new cameras and smaller, more portable microphones. Yet for all of its vividness as an affectionate depiction of a year in the life in the rural island community of L'Isle-aux-Coudres, it essentially represents a fiction, the townspeople having revived long-abandoned whale-hunting traditions on the encouragement of the NFB visitors. And for all the vigour and enthusiasm the islanders display as they embrace the ways of the oldtimers, there's little to suggest these practices will gain a new footing in the present. Chances for their revival are further impaired by the limited success of islanders' attempts to capture the belugas they're hoping to sell to zoos for big bucks.

Nevertheless, the film and its subjects maintain a buoyant spirit, the vitality of the fishermen at work matched by the townsfolk in other scenes, including a raucous sequence depicting mid-Lent festivities. Sharing camera duties with Bernard Gosselin and Marcel Carrière, Brault demonstrates the same agility, timing and flair for composition that he'd continue to bring to his own films and



Island life: Canada's first Cannes competitor, 1963's *Pour la suite du monde* showcased the intimacy and spontaneity enabled by new recording technologies

projects by other directors, including Claude Jutra's *Mon Oncle Antoine* (1971), still Canadian cinema's crown jewel. As for Perrault – who trained as a lawyer before becoming a filmmaker, writer and tireless chronicler of Québécois culture – he's clearly enamoured of the down-home vernacular of loquacious geezers like Alexis Tremblay, a town patriarch who also figures in Perrault's three subsequent films about L'Isle-aux-Coudres, *Le règne du jour* (1967), *Les voitures d'eau* (1968) and *Le beau plaisir* (1969).

While Perrault continued his journeys into the lives and landscapes of his beloved Charlevoix County, Brault adapted many of his *cinéma-direct* innovations to two narrative films. Both reflected the massive societal change occurring as Quebec unshackled itself from the rigid control of former premier Maurice Duplessis and the Catholic church, forces that had kept Quebec stuck in the 1940s. Brault's short 'Geneviève' (1965) – part of an omnibus film that included contributions by Rouch and Hiroshi Teshigahara – and his first feature, *Entre la mer et l'eau douce* (1967), also benefited from early screen appearances by Geneviève Bujold. She's especially luminous in the latter as a Montreal waitress who is loved then spurned by an ambitious, feckless *chanteur* (Claude Gauthier). Portraying the tale's showbiz milieu in a firmly downbeat style, Brault is astute about the role of pop culture in the burgeoning debates about Quebec's political future.

The tensions that prompted Quebec's separatist movement are also prevalent in Perrault's *Un pays sans bon sens!* (1970), an essay juxtaposing the perspectives of French Canadians, aborigines in Quebec and Bretons in France on being a people without a state. By turns wry, wistful and combative, it uses its subjects' words to lament Quebec's lot as a "ridiculous kind of country" (as the title roughly translates), one whose citizenry can barely imagine what true autonomy would be like because of the fundamentally local nature of their notions of community. The repeated failures of the province's separatist politicians to create a viable exit strategy from the rest of Canada may have been foreseen by the film's most memorable subject, a scientist who likens his fellow Quebecers to laboratory mice who lack the necessary "maturity" to attain emancipation. A reflection of the flustered tenor of its times, Perrault's film was lucky to evade the fate of other efforts by peers in the NFB's French unit that were suppressed due to their politically sensitive content. A despairing account of injustice and hardship among textile workers, Denys Arcand's *On est au coton* (1971) would not be released in its uncensored form until 2004.

Brault and Perrault reunited on *L'Acadie, l'Acadie???* (1971), a fascinating study of contrasting tactics, desires and philosophies within a group of student radicals in Moncton, New Brunswick. Again, the focus is on a French-Canadian struggle for self-determination but the conditions are very different. The francophone minority here are the Acadians, descendants of the 17th-century French colonists originally expelled from the region during the Seven Years' War (many of those deported would end up as 'Cajuns' in Louisiana while others returned to settle in New Brunswick). Campaigning for



Before the law: *Les Ordres*

equal language and education rights, several student representatives of New Brunswick's first francophone university have a humiliating encounter with Moncton's Anglophone mayor and city council. After two students express their pique by dumping a pig's head on the mayor's lawn, the conflict escalates. Though the film may have the same expressions of idealistic fervour and internal dissension characteristic of the era's many other film portraits of campus activism, Perrault and Brault take an unusually long view. The rueful final scenes present these young Acadians as prisoners of history, doomed to re-enact a tragic cycle of rebellion, defeat and dispersal.

Back in Quebec, such dreams of nationhood would soon curdle into violence. In October 1970, Canada experienced its most profound political crisis when members of the separatist paramilitary *Front de libération du Québec* (FLQ) kidnapped British trade commissioner James Cross and provincial labour minister Pierre Laporte. The latter was later found dead in a car boot. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau responded by enacting the War Measures Act, which included the deployment of military troops and tanks to guard federal buildings and employees. The suspension of habeas corpus also led to the arrest and detention of hundreds of people, most of whom were never charged with any crime. The country's swift descent into a Kafkaesque police state is the subject of Brault's *Les Ordres* (1974), a chilling docudrama based on interviews with

The filmmakers' subjects can seem like prisoners of history, doomed to re-enact a tragic cycle of rebellion, defeat and dispersal



State of affairs: *Un pays sans bon sens!*

innocent civilians who'd been rounded up in the sweeps and imprisoned with no explanation. As steely and harrowing as the most powerful fact-fiction hybrids of Alan Clarke and Peter Watkins, *Les Ordres* earned Brault his greatest exposure internationally – he and Costa-Gavras shared the direction prize at Cannes in 1975.

Perrault was not so fortunate when *La Bête Lumineuse* premiered there in 1983. According to David Clandfield's *Pierre Perrault and the Poetic Documentary* (the sole English-language monograph on the director), the first screening inspired hundreds of walkouts and garnered a thorough trashing in *Cahiers du cinéma*. Response in Canada was similarly divided to Perrault's provocation, which deliberately blurs distinctions between the real and the staged in its boisterous account of burly men on a moose-hunting trip in rural Quebec. However, it now seems like the apex of his career. As high-spirited boozing and shirtless carousing descend into ugly displays of cruelty and intimidation, Perrault reveals a grim array of discomfiting truths about male camaraderie and competition. It's like watching the rumpled characters of John Cassavetes's *Husbands* blundering through the Canadian wilderness in search of something to kill.

No wonder Perrault – who continually returned to the subject of man's often fraught relationship with the natural world – eventually excluded humankind from the rugged landscapes he so loved. *L'Oumigmag ou l'objectif documentaire* (1993) and *Cornouailles* (1994) – his final two films before his death in 1999 – were the product of seven expeditions to Quebec's northern coastline to gather stunning views of the remote Arctic region's flora and fauna. His principal focus was the muskox, massive horned beasts that look ready to survive another ice age. Yet he had little interest in conventional nature documentary. Excising any evidence of human presence from the frame yet never allowing viewers to forget their status as unwelcome intruders, Perrault pays tribute to these shaggy creatures with a voiceover closer to an epic poem than anything uttered by David Attenborough. In one of the stranger highlights of *Cornouailles*, the narrator compares mating musk oxen to "two rocks dovetailing the foundation of a temple". This love letter to the musk oxen ends Perrault's career in a fashion that seems appropriately elegiac yet marked by his characteristic self-consciousness about his role as a chronicler of places and choreographer of truths.

Brault – whose final major work was *Quand je serai parti... vous vivrez encore* (When I'm Gone... You'll Still Be Alive, 1999), a historical drama about a bid to be rid of the British Empire that predated the FLQ by 130 years – maintained a similar ambivalence about the documentarian's role despite his vast contribution to the history of (ostensibly) non-fiction filmmaking. "Truth is something unattainable," he said in an interview in Peter Wintonick's documentary *Cinéma Vérité Defining The Moment* (2008). "We can't think we're creating truth with a camera. But what we can do is reveal something to viewers that allows them to create their own truth." ☀

i Michel Brault is the subject of a retrospective at TIFF Cinematheque, Toronto, from 17 to 22 April



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AMERICAN REFUGEES

Bill Morrison, expert aesthetician of decay and disappearance, turns his attention to the forgotten flood that devastated interwar America

By Sukhdev Sandhu

At first, it was called the Mississippi River Flood. That didn't capture the immensity of its devastation, the Biblical ruination it wrought. In time it became known as the Great Flood. Between the summers of 1926 and 1927, 16.5 million acres across seven states of the US were submerged. More than 14 per cent of Arkansas lay beneath water. Nashville's Cumberland River stood over 17 metres. Hundreds died and more than 600,000 were dislocated, many forever. Any amount of numbers could be trotted out to evoke the scale of the calamity. But what good are numbers? America clings to its genius for amnesia, sees it as a precondition of modernity, and these days, even after Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Sandy, the Great Flood is almost completely forgotten.

This double erosion – in the realms of both cartography and of public memory – is familiar territory to Bill Morrison. The New York-based filmmaker is one of the world's foremost aestheticians of decay and disappearance. *Decasia* (2002) was a ghostly valentine to old nitrate films: at exactly the moment when digital media was being (falsely) championed for its stability, Morrison was creating rapturous, arrhythmic visual poetry out of the fragility of film and all its streaks, flares, bubbles and decompositional effects. In *The Miners' Hymns* (2011), he raked through the archives to find footage, much of it pocked and distressed, of coalminers in the north of England. It was hard not see the disfigured images as a symbol of the ways in which so many livelihoods and communities had been disfigured, first by Thatcherite neoliberalism, then by a Blairite variation of the same that appeared ashamed of the role trade unions played in the development of the British left.

Morrison's latest project, *The Great Flood*, exists because natural disasters are visual feasts, catnip for adventurous filmmakers. Cameramen from across and beyond America travelled to the South to document the unfolding drama. Morrison includes footage of levees being dynamited with the goal of submerging small towns in order to save New Orleans. He shows Herbert Hoover, who would become president in 1929, posing for photographers. Most of all, he's assembled a gorgeous selection of dark pastoral: plaintive landscapes full of trees rendered mobile, main streets where all that's visible are the roofs of cold-storage warehouses, empty bank buildings. As with photographs of abandoned Detroit or Cold War architecture in the Soviet Union, there co-exists here both rapture and melancholy, beauty and bathos.

Contemporary films about floods or climate change tend to be emergency bulletins, strategically alarmist calls to arms. Spike Lee's *When The Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts* (2006), Davis Guggenheim's *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) and Jon Shenk's *The Island President*



Water torture: *The Great Flood* collects contemporary footage of the 1926-27 Mississippi River Flood

Was the flood such a disaster after all? For thousands of black Americans, it was a grand liberation, a trigger to head north

(2011) are all muscular, buoyed by their sense of righteousness, more or less pedagogic. In Lee's film, a black guy who's displaced from his home after Hurricane Katrina cries out: "I'm an American. How can I be a refugee?" It's a sincere cry, an angry cry, and yet it's also parochial and historically ignorant. There should be a pause, a space for reflection – but the story gushes forward.

With the exception of one buzzy sequence in which another 1920s is mapped out via the



Defence of the realm: *The Great Flood*

pages of a Sears, Roebuck catalogue – fashionable, metro-modern, consumerist – *The Great Flood*, helped by a moody score from jazz guitarist and long-time Morrison collaborator Bill Frisell, adopts a more rueful, ruminative approach. Morrison can do this because, nearly 90 years later, what happened in 1926-27 doesn't seem as divisive or politically combustible as it once did. With the benefit of hindsight, he can even suggest that this might not have been a disaster at all; indeed, for thousands of black Americans, the Great Flood was a grand liberation, the trigger for them to throw off the shackles of servitude and head north to cities such as Chicago.

Some of the film's most startling footage shows how brutal normal life for them had been, watched over by an overseer on horseback, the sun beating down on their stooped backs, their hands scarred and arthritic. Later, they're shown doing a lot of the grunt work involved in trying to stop the rising waters engulf various towns. Many reside in temporary camps. When it comes to evacuation, they're only allowed to leave after white people and livestock. At the end, Morrison includes extended footage of relocated black men and women lost in music, dancing in ecstasy, fashioning a brave new world. It's a thrilling scene and a shocking one too, provoking the thought that maybe – just maybe – what modern America needs is also a deluge to topple its moral architecture. **S**

i *The Great Flood* is showing at Flatpack Film Festival, Birmingham, on 29 March. *Decasia* and *The Miners' Hymns* are also screening in the festival

HOW TO WRITE A FILM ON A PIANO

By physically carving soundtracks onto celluloid, Norman McLaren – who would have turned 100 this April – anticipated digital music

By Crystal Chan

“I have said somewhere that it was not enough to hear music,” Stravinsky once noted. “One must also see it.” The synaesthesia of Norman McLaren’s animations might not have been what he had in mind but it’s this drive to marry sound and image that propelled the Oscar- and Palme d’Or-winning pioneer. He’s known for making films without a camera; he also created music with light. Half scientist, half artist, McLaren would have turned 100 this April.

As a teenager in Scotland, he would lie back with his eyes closed, listening to music on the radio and watching dancing shapes projected by his mind. He started making films, always with “a musical script” instead of dialogue, attempting a “visual translation of the music”. McLaren was a good translator. The visuals of ‘Colour Cocktail’, the amateur silent short that led to his discovery by documentarist John Grierson, were so well matched to a gramophone record that people were convinced the sound and image had been pre-synced.

In his early 20s, while working at Grierson’s British GPO Film Unit, McLaren noticed that knife marks on a film’s soundtrack played back as interesting sounds. (Engineers and artists at the Leningrad Conservatory and in Germany had separately discovered this graphic sound.) McLaren scratch-composed a soundtrack for a film but it was rejected by his producer. A few years later, having emigrated to New York, he animated both the images and sounds of his vibrant handmade shorts for the Guggenheim, including ‘Dots’ (1940) and ‘Loops’ (1940), in order to avoid paying for music rights.

Soon after, McLaren relocated to the National Film Board of Canada, where he spent most of his career. During his first years there, he founded the animation studio and oversaw a series of proto-music videos set to folk songs. Later, he would work with musicians as diverse as Pete Seeger, Oscar Peterson, Ravi Shankar and Glenn Gould but from early on he told friends of his plans “eventually to be able to compose my own music... I’ve had no formal training – but I know I could compose.”

So he composed for the instrument he knew best: actual physical film. He used animated sound, an innovative sort of electronic, optical-graphical music predating Moog’s first experiments and sounding, in McLaren’s words, like “a small orchestra of clicking, thudding, buzzing and drumlike timbres”. These seemingly magical techniques literally produced sound out of drawings. Although this was frequently termed ‘synthetic’ music, it didn’t imitate instruments, as a keyboard synthesiser does. “I like to look on this new medium as a fresh new musical instrument in itself,” said McLaren. Others filmmakers, including Claude Jutra and the Whitney brothers, would also try their hand at animated sound but McLaren developed it



Norman McLaren: ‘I like to look on this new medium as a fresh new musical instrument in itself’

further than any other. He was a literal recording artist: in his technique, to record was to compose.

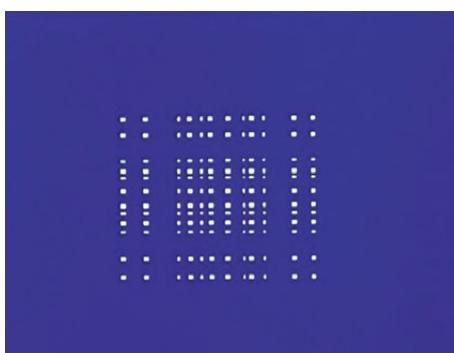
He marked up a filmstrip’s soundtrack with an array of pencils, pens, brushes, razor blades and other tools. Often, in a freehand improvisational style, his tools hovered and danced on the film as it fed through the Moviola. McLaren controlled tone through shape, volume through thickness and pitch through the number of his slashes. One result was the Morse code-like percussion of ‘Mosaic’ (1965): when McLaren found the Hollywood-recorded soundtrack he had commissioned “totally unacceptable”, he simply decided to “engrave one on the film myself using a penknife”. He started out making images from sounds; now he created sounds with images.

At the Film Board, McLaren both inspired and was stimulated by like-minded musicians. Maurice Blackburn would invent something for each film he did and propelled the founding of the *Atelier de conception et de réalisations sonores* for electro-acoustic music research; Louis Applebaum experimented on what we would now call a synthesiser. McLaren was invited to join the national composers’

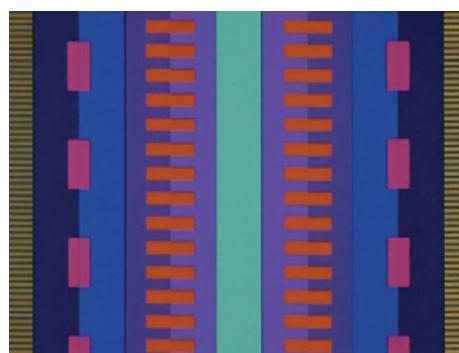
McLaren’s work would be at home in a new-media gallery, scoring a video game or mixed into an electronica dance track

association and to lecture at Juilliard and the Acoustical Society of America. John Cage played McLaren’s music at his New York concerts.

With filmmaker Evelyn Lambart, McLaren developed a deck of pitch cards, a ‘keyboard’ that allowed the exact musical pitches of a piano to be photographed on to the soundtrack. The blips, whirs, and (in one critic’s words) raspberry kisses of his hand-etched scores made way for this card-animated music, which resembles synthesiser, 8-bit or digital music, decades in advance. He first used his cards for ‘Now Is the Time’ (1951), a 3D film boasting a parallel multidimensional audio system of independent speakers that wrapped around the audience. He used the same cards for the Cold War allegory ‘Neighbours’ (1952), his most famous film. The futuristic, otherworldly



Sound is vision: ‘Mosaic’ (1965)



Rainbow seismograph: ‘Syncromy’ (1971)

PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA

timbre of its melodies casts an eerie pall over the film's otherwise conventional start – two neighbours sitting on their lawns and reading their newspapers – foreshadowing their fight to the death over a flower sprouting from the grass.

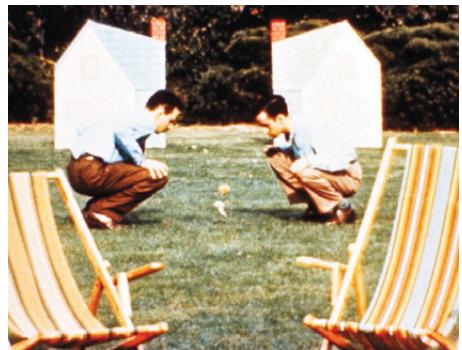
'Synchromy' (1971), the last of McLaren's many abstract films, was the apex of the card system and the culmination of McLaren's marriage of sound and image. It's a rainbow seismograph, a radical animated short in which you see what you hear. The moving kaleidoscope on screen is actually the sound track, the part of the filmstrip that contains the audio; McLaren coloured, multiplied and reorganised it for our viewing pleasure, the catchy, nearly-neon colours paralleling the cheeky boogie-woogie of McLaren's score. Filming him writing the 'perpetual motion' tune on a piano for 'Synchromy', photographing pitch cards to match it and finally transforming the soundtrack into visuals, the BBC documentary *The Eye Hears, the Ear Sees* (1971) explains that "this man is doing something that no one in the world has ever done before: he's writing a film on the piano".

As a musical instrument, film was cheap, ensured a tidy sync between image and audio and allowed instant replay. Such advantages are now offered by computers; one piece of Mac software, Metasynth, creates soundscapes out of graphic designs. Like many of McLaren's films, 'Synchromy' looks and sounds as if it were made on a computer; his work would be at home in a new-media gallery, scoring a video game or mixed into an electronica dance track. But it isn't made obsolete by the digital age; it heralds its spirit at its best.

For a time, animated music promised one of the few user-friendly, universal music-making experiences around. UNESCO sent McLaren to train filmmakers in rural China: soundtrack recording was out of the question but they were able to draw on the soundtrack. McLaren concluded: "I would like to make an international language of the music for the film." That new idiom, for him, was animated music.

"A basic quality of us human beings, and in fact all living creatures, is that we are always moving," McLaren once wrote. "It is this motion that is the heart of cinema." Beating through the synthesis of sound and image of McLaren's animations is the spontaneity – and movement – of life. ☀

i **Norman McLaren centennial events,** including screenings and workshops, start in April and are being run by the NFB in Canada and the Centre for the Moving Image in the UK. www.mclaren2014.com



War games: 'Neighbours' (1952)

Filmmakers and indigenous people were collaborating on hybrid features years before *Nanook of the North*



By Pamela Hutchinson

One hundred years ago, a film with a genuine claim to landmark status was shot, released and promptly forgotten about. Since then, the footage has been lost, fished from a dustbin, re-edited, rescored, retitled, renamed and rereleased. Now, in its centenary year, *In the Land of the Headhunters* emerges as a spectacular, and resilient, film.

Eight years before Robert Flaherty's docudrama *Nanook of the North* became a breakout hit, Edward S. Curtis's *In the Land of the Headhunters*, which was more or less a flop, was the first feature film with a cast entirely made up of Native North Americans. As with the later film, any claim to documentary realism withers under the merest scrutiny but the film nevertheless vividly captures a way of life that was coming to an end. Poised awkwardly between ethnographic documentary and exotic fiction, it is set among the Kwakwaka'wakw people of Vancouver Island, British Columbia. Curtis had more than done his homework. He was the author of 20 hefty leather-bound volumes entitled *The North American Indian*, the product of lavish research funded by J.P. Morgan that drew on thousands of photographs, wax-cylinder recordings and film footage. He had also presented his findings in lecture tours with animated magic lantern slides. His particular interest was in the Kwakwaka'wakw and in 1912, with local expert George Hunt, he set about making a movie.

Curtis intended "to give a glimpse of the primitive Americans as they lived in the Stone Age", but the film makes no attempt to situate its lurid melodrama as either history or fiction. In fact, the immediacy of the film form implies that this is a document of its own time. The scenario, which Curtis published as a book written "in the declamatory style of the tribal bards", is a pungent mixture of violence, display, ritual, revenge and mysticism. Young warrior Motana discovers his love for Naida in a vision brought on by fasting but her father betroths her to a terrifying sorcerer instead. Motana and his father, a respected chief, attack the village where the sorcerer and his vicious brother Yaklus live, and exchange the sorcerer's decapitated head for Naida's hand in marriage. After the wedding, Yaklus and his men take bloody revenge and kidnap Naida.

This tale works very well on film. Naida's face hovers in the air, superimposed on woodsmoke; untrained actors fight and fish amid sunlit scenery; ceremonies and dances crowd the frame with movement and ornate costumes; travelling shots trace dugout canoes skimming across the water as living figureheads – a bear, a

The film makes no attempt to situate its lurid melodrama as either history or fiction



In the Land of the Headhunters

wasp, the Thunderbird – dance in the prow.

The book includes a first encounter between the Kwakwaka'wakw people and white visitors, which would situate the story in the late 18th century. No such meeting takes place in the film, which perhaps unintentionally bolsters the false impression that what we are seeing has been untouched by director or prop-maker.

Even if one disregards the narrative, *In the Land of the Headhunters* is less point-and-shoot travelogue than neat forgery of a lost world. Like Nanook's notorious igloo, the film's totem-poles and painted cedar-plank houses were built to be filmed – in fact they were just fronts, constructed like movie sets a few yards from the villagers' modern frame houses. Kwakwaka'wakw mythology runs through the film, from the feathered costumes and ceremonial dances to Motana's night on the Island of the Dead conversing with the skulls of his ancestors – but these beliefs were on the wane in 1914. Even potlatch, like headhunting, was illegal. The characterful dugout canoes, central to the film's ethnographic splendour, were crewed by the few young men in the region with the skill to do so.

And so *In the Land of the Headhunters* benefits from timing as well as sleight of hand. By the early 20th century, the numbers of Kwakwaka'wakw people in British Columbia were dwindling, their habits changing. Today only around 250 people out of a population of 5,500 speak the Kwak'wala language. It could be argued that Curtis stepped in at precisely the right time, before there was little left to shoot. His film has certainly defied the passing of time and the indifference of contemporary audiences: critics praised the film's "new vista of camera miracles" but moviegoers cared little, distracted perhaps by war in Europe. Although the film was thought to have been lost, a damaged copy was found in 1947 and donated to a Chicago museum. Historians Bill Holm and George Irving Quimby restored it and released it with the more sympathetic title *In the Land of the War Canoes* and a soundtrack of Kwakwaka'wakw music in 1974. More recently recovered material was incorporated into a 2008 DVD release; Milestone Films plans to bring out a centenary edition this year. A good facsimile rather than the real thing, entertaining when it is not ethnographic, Curtis's film may finally have found its audience. ☀

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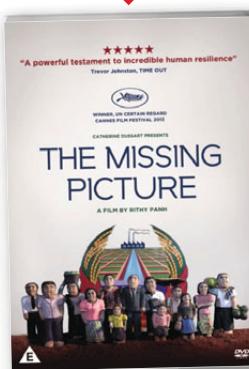


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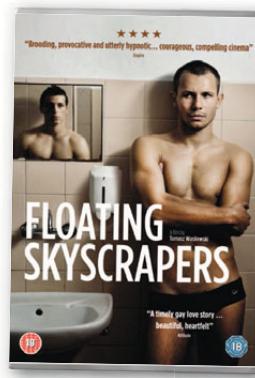
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SATISFY THE NEED IN ME

An absurd but affecting pathos underlies US artist Michael Smith's Reagan-era video alter ego Mike, rediscovered for a new exhibition

By John Beagles

What would happen if you met a man who was a cipher, who was nothing more than the sum of all the media sloganeering, corporate propaganda and nationalist mythology he'd spent a lifetime ingesting? Travel to the Tramway Gallery in April and you'll meet one. Here, you'll find a video installation showcasing Mike, the alternative persona of American artist Michael Smith.

Smith created Mike in the late 70s as "this bland, nerdy character who has a lot of received ideas, mainly from TV and advertising". Mike's essence is (to use a very Mike word) neatly distilled in the lyrics to the Devo-like 1984 pop video 'Go For It, Mike': "Some people are born to win. Some people are born to lose. Then there are people like me and you..." Mike's an all-American everyman, someone who has stayed resolutely in the middle of life, pottering around in his blue shirt, baseball cap and chinos, which are held up with a buckle emblazoned with 'Mike'. This is not to say his life has been empty of desire. Propelled by the galvanising mantras of his age (Smith's creation became prominent during Reaganism), Mike's an itinerant 'dream-catcher', someone who has always striven to be a 'winner'. Unfortunately, as the mini-retrospective at the Tramway – curated by Mark Beasley under the new Glasgow International Festival directorship of Sarah McCrory – will show, whether as a businessman, disco dancer, student, artist or cable show host, Mike's reach has always been frustratingly beyond his grasp.

In Mike's world, then, the mythic narratives of the American dream are played out. In videos such as 'Portal Excursion' (2007) and 'Down in the Rec Room' (1979), it's clear that Mike's a good consumer and a productive citizen, someone who looks upon his self as a dormant piece of real estate that needs to be developed. Yet despite following the script of how to live the good life, Mike's still left with a gnawing sense of emptiness. Throughout Smith's fictional documentation of Mike's world there's a pervasive sense of the melancholic pathos of his middle-class life, created by the shortfalls of the American dream. Many of these frustrations are both existential and specifically related to the conformist, conservative culture Mike exists in. In 'Down in the Rec Room', Mike dances along to a glittery Osmonds disco number on his TV, alone in his sparse apartment because he has thrown a party but nobody has come; the gap between aspiration and reality here is painful in its intensity. The American dream is incapable of satisfying the need in Mike.

The pathos of Mike's life is primarily communicated through Smith's performance. His facial and bodily movements are perfect in their subtle externalisation of Mike's quiet interior despair. As Mike's face flips between a befuddled expression – like a labrador having Nietzsche explained to him – and a half-hearted



All-American everyman: Mike in 1983's 'Government Approved Fallout Shelter and Snack Bar'

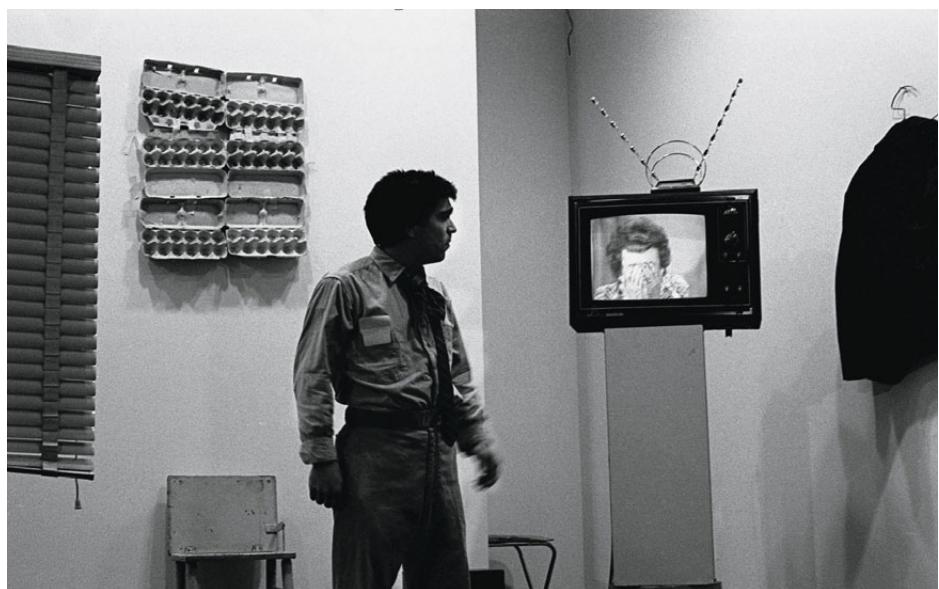
smile, it's difficult not to regard him as a living ventriloquist's dummy, especially as one eyebrow appears permanently higher than the other. The fact that Michael the artist performs Mike the character without any laboured irony or contempt makes the performance all the more memorable. For those not lost in narcissistic fantasies of their own triumph, there is a plaintive, recognisable pleasure to be had in watching and sharing in Mike's failed attempts to be a better person. The tragic comedy of 'Portal Excursion', in which Mike hilariously recounts his attempts to learn two new words every day, is strangely affecting, for example.

Mike's 'neato' encapsulation of the bland horror of living a wholesome, consensual life is timely in today's Britain

Mike is a device for exposing the fallacy of populist fantasy projections about 'the people' and a critique of the culture that attempts to 'engineer' a society of Mikes. But he is also a spur to agency. If you caught yourself being Mike-like, would you feel comfortable? Smith's videos are political without resorting to simple condemnations or a position of superiority.

Clearly, there is a Mike in all of us. Mike's 'neato' encapsulation of the bland horror of living a wholesome, consensual life and pursuing readymade dreams is timely. Seeing this work in the 80s or 90s might have been exotic in Britain. Now its proximity is all too real and toxic. The highly prescient nature of the work means that this exhibition is, as Mike would say, 'really on the money'. S

i Michael Smith's exhibition 'Videos and Miscellaneous Stuff from Storage (pt.2)' is at Tramway 1 from 4 to 21 April as part of Glasgow International



Home alone: 'Down in the Rec Room' (1979)



new wave *films*



'Panh's remarkable new documentary works as a survivor's testament, a film about memory and loss... Subtle, discreet and sensitive.'

Geoffrey Macnab, The Independent

'An achingly sad, personal film about an inhumanity almost beyond imagining. Panh tells the story by splicing his own narration – which takes on the quality of a searing poem – with archival film...devastating.'

Jenny McCartney, The Sunday Telegraph

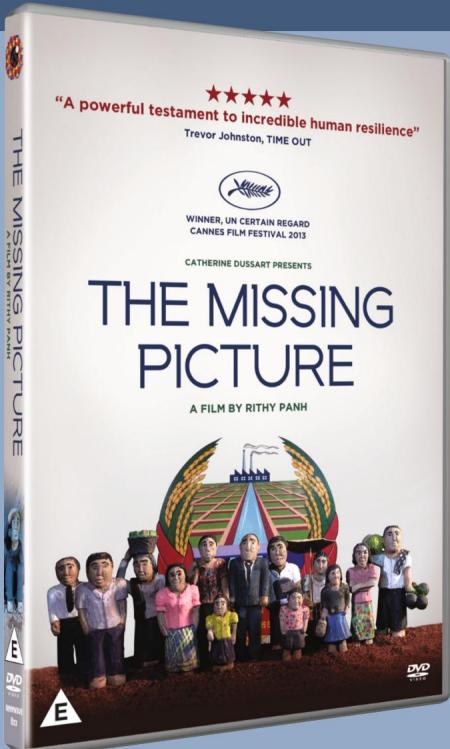
‘Image by image, word by word, simplicities build the story of a true-life national tragedy... It engages, informs, moves, amazes, disturbs.’

Nigel Andrews, The Financial Times

A row of four red five-pointed stars, likely used as a decorative element or rating system.

'I've never seen anything like this film... It's a meditation on individualism and poetry; the power of image to remind and exorcise; the ruthless zeal of revolution; the endurance of memory and family, and the human will to survive.'

Jason Solomons, The Mail on Sunday



The Missing Picture

Rithy Panh

Oscar nominated for Best Foreign Language film, Rithy Panh's latest adapts his memoir *The Elimination*, about his childhood when he and his family were expelled from Phnom Penh and deported to camps in the country by the Khmer Rouge, who took over Cambodia in 1975. Millions died from starvation, over-work or pure brutality. Rithy Panh was the only member of his family to survive.

With a brilliant visual coup, Panh recreates life under the Khmer Rouge using tiny, hand-painted figurines. This allows him to show, in a profoundly affecting way, the horror that could not otherwise be reconstructed in a conventional manner.

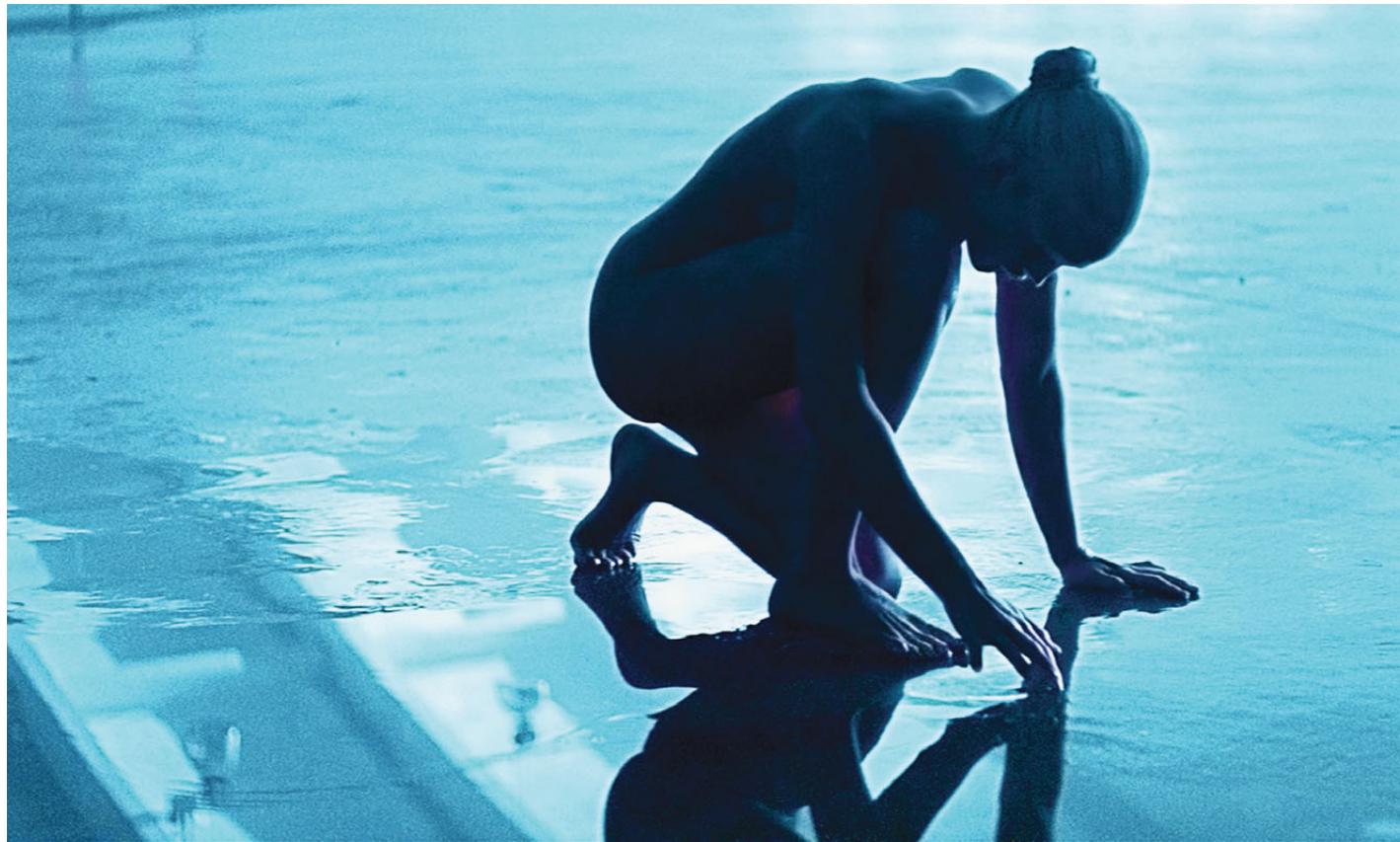
The Blu-ray and DVD come with the original French narration and an alternative English narration.

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Reviews



78 **The Machine**

Set in a future where a cold war with China has resulted in bionically enhanced supersoldiers and killing machines, this science fiction from writer-director Caradog James offsets its modest budget with big ideas and an unusual feminist slant



58 Films of the month



66 Films



94 Home Cinema



104 Books



Ordinary people: Tahar Rahim as Samir and Bérénice Bejo as Marie in Asghar Farhadi's family drama *The Past*

The Past

France/Italy 2013

Director: Asghar Farhadi
Certificate 12A 130m 23s

Reviewed by Ginette Vincendeau

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist
The Past, shot in France by the Iranian director Asghar Farhadi, is his much anticipated follow-up to the award-winning *A Separation* (2011), and his first film made outside Iran. Like the earlier film, *The Past* is a family drama, a slowly unfolding yet intense tale with several revelations in store; and it similarly deploys superb performances from all the actors, including the children. More surprising is the dexterity with which Farhadi films Paris and its suburbs, offering a view at once realistically familiar and unexpected.

The film begins with the reunion of Marie (Bérénice Bejo) and Ahmad (Ali Mosaffa) at Charles de Gaulle airport. She has summoned him from Iran ostensibly to complete their

divorce proceedings following their separation several years earlier. From the very beginning the *mise en scène* instils a feeling of tension. Though Marie and Ahmad are civil to each other, the details of their meeting tell another story: the panes of glass that separate them at the airport, the silences and gazes they exchange in the car, the discreet but insistent evocation of small problems on the road and parking on the trip to her home, the pouring rain outside. Their arrival at Marie's house, in a quiet suburban cul-de-sac next to a railway line, continues this theme. Two young children play in a messy garden, their bicycle chain broken: they are Léa (Jeanne Jestin), Marie's daughter, and Fouad (Elyes Aguis), the son of Samir (Tahar Rahim), her new lover, whose child she is expecting. The broken chain, the clutter of the garden, the house in the process of being redecorated, the arguments about who sleeps in which bed – again, all these things economically suggest the complex and volatile nature of the relationships between the different members of this modern *famille recomposée*. Similarly, the theme of the hold of the

past over the present, announced in the film's title, is brilliantly woven through the decor and myriad incidents: the new paint on the walls, which is an attempt to erase Ahmad's presence but which stubbornly sticks to him; Ahmad's belongings in the shed; the stain on a dress that, as in a fairytale, will not go away; the memory of Samir's cologne that may yet awaken Céline, his wife (Aleksandra Kłębńska), from her coma.

Ahmad is from the start a calming, avuncular figure (none of the children is his) and he succeeds in quietly asserting his authority, especially when Marie asks him to talk to her rebellious teenage daughter Lucie (Pauline Burlet). Actually and symbolically, Ahmad is the fixer: the one who mends bikes, unblocks drains, mops up spilt paint, puts a bandage on a child's finger and even cooks dinner, while Marie ineffectually screams at the kids or is away at work. Although Marie is portrayed – for instance on the film's posters – as the central character, caught between the two men (Bejo received the Best Actress prize at Cannes), the story is in fact told in two major movements, first from Ahmad's



French critics have compared Farhadi to Claude Sautet and Maurice Pialat: he is more incisive than the former and less abrasive than the latter

Naïma (Sabrina Ouazani), Samir's employee, who are in effect pitted against each other. Samir's part in this, meanwhile, is erased by the strong last image of his hand clenched by Céline's.

Farhadi has been hailed before for the strength of his actors' performances, and *The Past* confirms his talent in this direction. Using his experience from the stage, he puts his actors through lengthy rehearsals and in a Method-like way encourages them to imagine the past and background of the characters they play. The result is stunning and, if Bejo deserves her Cannes award, Mosaffa and Rahim certainly merit equal acclaim for their performances of quiet yet powerful intensity. The children's acting is impressive too, especially Elyes Aguis as Fouad. (One scene is particularly poignant, as Samir and Fouad argue in the Métro, the two closely framed in long takes.) Despite being a foreigner to the French language, Farhadi has also succeeded in assembling a subtle array of oral tonalities, from the unaccented French of Marie and Lucie to the faint echo of North Africa in Samir's speech and the stronger one in Naïma's, as well as Ahmar's Iranian accent. Indeed, Naïma's accented voice, as opposed to the French voice of Céline (as we are told, since we never hear her), is the ultimate clue to the mystery of the suicide bid.



Ali Mosaffa, Elyes Aguis and Jeanne Jestin

The Past evokes Paris and its suburbs in ways that transcend cliché. The suburb of Sevran where Marie lives, on the (real) Rue de Paris, far to the north-east of the city, is one France's poorest places. Yet Farhadi avoids the stereotypical *banlieue* depiction of tower blocks and graffiti-covered walls familiar from such films as *La Haine* (1995). We see a slightly rundown yet not miserable street, with small detached pavilions surrounded by gardens; it is the habitat of many people in the suburbs of Paris, who may find themselves cheek-by-jowl with the more deprived and 'difficult' housing estates but who live ordinary lives – as does Marie, working for a chemist in Paris. By contrast, scenes around the chemist and Samir's dry-cleaning business display as background the classic visual grammar of tall Parisian buildings and tree-lined avenues, but without dwelling on them or turning them into a spectacle. Farhadi has said that he wanted to avoid a tourist's view of the city and he has succeeded. The interiors of Marie's and Samir's homes equally plausibly evoke 'ordinary' households that are neither picturesque nor depressing.

French critics, who have enthusiastically embraced the film, have compared Farhadi to Claude Sautet and Maurice Pialat. High praise indeed, but as demonstrated by *The Past*, the Iranian director is more incisive than the former and less abrasive than the latter. In its representation of Paris and its suburbs, and also in its combination of emotional melodrama, family saga and suspenseful narrative, *The Past* is, in many ways, more acute about 'ordinary' people in contemporary France than many French films. 



Tahar Rahim as Samir

point of view and then from Samir's. It is the two men who, in a series of beautifully orchestrated revelations, gradually unveil the painful mystery at the heart of the narrative – the suicide attempt by Samir's wife Céline that has left her in a coma.

Despite its nuanced depiction of complex emotions – from affection to, more often, fear, anger or resentment – the film does not escape gender stereotyping. The men resemble each other physically and in their behaviour – they are dark, bearded, with a calm and authoritative demeanour – while Marie and Lucie are both tall, long-haired beauties prone to hysterics, tears and violent outbursts of emotion. We are told that Ahmad deserted Marie four years earlier and has been unreliable since; she reproaches him several times for failing to turn up in response to her call the previous year. Yet what we witness on screen is his impeccable behaviour in the present, and in the absence of access to Marie's subjectivity it is hard for the viewer to imagine otherwise. Similarly, while the two men almost immediately get on, the burden of guilt for Céline's suicide shifts between Marie, Lucie and eventually

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Alexandre Mallet-Guy

Written by

Ashgar Farhadi

Adaptation of

Screenplay

Massouneh Lahidji

Director of

Photography

Mahmoud Kalari

Editing

Juliette Welfling

Production Designer

Claude Lenoir

Original Music

Evgueni Galperine

Youli Galperine

Sound

Dana Farzanehpour

Thomas

Desjorquères

Bruno Tarrière

Costume Designer

Jean-Daniel

Vuillermoz

Memento Films
Production, France
3 Cinéma, Bim

Distribuzione, Alvy
Distribution, CN3
Productions

Production Companies

Memento Films

Production present

a co-production

of Memento Films

Production, France

3 Cinéma, Bim

Distribuzione

with the participation

of Canal+, Ciné+

France Télévisions

with the support of

Eurimages, Région

Île-de-France, Centre

National du Cinéma

et de l'image animée,

Programme Media de

l'Union Européenne

in association

with Memento,

Films Distribution,

Cofinova 9, Indéfilms,

Cinéma 7,

Palatine Etoile 10

in co-production with

Alvy Distribution,
CN3 Productions

CAST

Bérénice Bejo

Ali Mosaffa

Tahar Rahim

Pauline Burlet

Elyes Aguis

Jeanne Jestin

Sabrina Ouazani

Babak Karimi

Valeria Cavalli

Valeria

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Artificial Eye Film

Company

11,734ft +8 frames

French theatrical title

Le Passé

Paris, the present. Ahmad arrives from his native Iran to finalise his divorce from Marie, his French ex. Marie, who works in a chemist's shop in Paris, lives in the working-class suburb of Sevran, north-east of the capital, with her daughters Léa and Lucie (from a different father), new lover Samir (whose child she is expecting) and his young son Fouad. Tensions between Marie and teenager Lucie centre on the latter's refusal to accept Samir's presence. Marie asks Ahmad to intervene. He discovers that Samir's wife Céline has been in a coma for months, following a suicide attempt apparently provoked by the revelation of Samir's affair with Marie. After Ahmad tells Lucie that her mother is pregnant, she leaves home one night. When Ahmad finds her at the home of his Iranian friend Shahryar, she tells him that she brought the affair to light by sending Marie and Samir's email exchanges to Céline. Samir and Fouad move out of Marie's home and go back to their apartment in Paris, above his dry-cleaning business. Marie and Lucie have a violent fight but are eventually reconciled. Later it becomes clear that it was Samir's employee Naïma who informed Céline of the affair. Samir visits Céline in hospital to test whether she recognises his cologne; the film ends with her hand apparently gripping his.

The Robber

Austria/Germany 2009
Director: Benjamin Heisenberg
Certificate 15 101m 25s

Reviewed by Andrew Tracy

Scott Fitzgerald once noted, and generations of Eng Lit classes have since made the insight banal, that action is character; but like many such valuable maxims, it's always true except when it isn't. Nevertheless, it has evidently been taken to heart by the filmmakers of the Berlin School, whose differing (sometimes widely differing) artistic interests and prerogatives do not dispel certain base similarities of method and manner. Just as so much Asian festival cinema of the past 20-odd years bears the mark of Hou Hsiao-hsien (whether that influence be direct or osmotic), so there is a distinguishable aesthetic shared among such filmmakers as Christian Petzold, Angela Schanelec, Maren Ade, Thomas Arslan, Christoph Hochhäusler, Ulrich Köhler and Benjamin Heisenberg, though it's one that seems to have developed collectively rather than under the sign of a single, powerful artistic personality. The cool distance and lack of sensationalism, even in the face of the occasional sensational event; the cleanly etched visuals and carefully curated aural environments, terse dialogue briefly puncturing the quietly enveloping ambient hum; and a rigorous externality applied to even the most inwardly deriving drama, insight into character and motive gleaned almost solely through the protagonists' decisive, if ultimately still mysterious, actions.

Not all drama, nor all mystery, is created equal, however. While there are genuine frissons to be found in the high-wire interpersonal dynamics of Ade's *The Forest for the Trees* (2003) and *Everyone Else* (2009), or in the nameless dread that haunts the deceptively serene surfaces of Schanelec's *Marseille* (2004) and *Afternoon* (2007), to these eyes there's considerably less in the airless precision of Petzold and Arslan's juiceless genre riffs. The opacity of the adulterous lovers in Petzold's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* redux *Jerichow* (2008) or the tough-guy gangster antihero of Arslan's *In the Shadows* (2010) is ultimately not too far from the bullshit mythologising of Nicolas Winding Refn's *Drive* (2011): all seem to operate from the assumption that genre tropes, when rendered with a kind of neo-Bressonian 'purity', are automatically elevated into archetype.

From its matter-of-fact title on down, there's more than a little of this same assumption at work in Heisenberg's *The Robber*, which takes the action-is-character mantra to its logical, 'perfect' end. A *film à clef* based on the criminal career of Austrian champion marathon runner and serial bank robber Johann Kastenberger – whose distinctive working attire of shotgun and rubber Ronald Reagan mask earned him the sobriquet 'Pumpgun Ronny' from the Austrian press – *The Robber* arrives bearing a triad of malleable metaphorical readymades in its self-consciously stripped-down scenario. Conjoining crime with running – which itself is veritably an all-purpose symbol of rebellion – affords any number of juicy hermeneutic readings; and in the redubbed robber Rettenberger – incarnated by Andreas Lust with cold intelligence and the uniquely sickly athleticism of the endurance runner – the film has an existentialist antihero par excellence, a man whose every *acte* is *gratuit* and whose



Lust for life: Andreas Lust as existential bank robber Johann Rettenberger

relentless, purposeful existence not only precedes but seems to preclude any potential essence.

Adapting the film with Martin Prinz from Prinz's novel, Heisenberg smartly handles this wealth of built-in symbolic possibilities by refusing to commit to any single one of them, eschewing overt interpretation of Rettenberger's actions just as he keeps mum as to the man's motives. "I see [Rettenberger] as a natural phenomenon. I never examined him in psychological terms or as a conglomerate of personal characteristics, but more as an animal," said Heisenberg in an interview during the film's production in 2008, and his words could serve as the Berlin School's underlying philosophy.

In *The Robber*, however, that observational imperative takes on even greater significance given the protagonist's own ceaseless self-monitoring, his quite literally scientific measuring of his own physical capabilities. For Rettenberger, running and robbing are not the opposing sides of what passes for his personality, nor does the one flow into or organically extend the other. While his fleet feet certainly come in handy when he cuts it too close during a botched heist in the film's only traditional 'action'

scene – pointedly eliciting the one instance of extradiegetic music, an urgent percussive beat keyed to Rettenberger's pumping legs and doubtlessly pounding heart – his brazenness as criminal has no essential correlation to his dogged determination as runner. As dutifully recorded via the pulse-rate calculator Rettenberger wears at virtually all times, these are simply the 'normal' biorhythmic variations of a ruthlessly managed biological existence premised on a willed severing from both the psychological and the social.

"What I do has nothing to do with what you



Andreas Lust, with Franziska Weisz as Erika



marathon victories and headline-grabbing heists). But even as Rettenberger actualises his radical singularity by a horizontal traversal of space in his running and robberies both, Heisenberg foreshortens the space through which he moves: visually via the long lens that is practically *de rigueur* in films of the Berlin School, and aurally via the music and random news reports that Rettenberger blares from car radios pre- and post-heist – placed so prominently in the mix that they are neither backdrop, accompaniment nor commentary on his actions, but rather, virtually coequal with them.

No matter his Spartan discipline and self-mastery, the ultimate effect is of Rettenberger being pressed under glass. Heisenberg has likened his method in some parts of the film to “a kind of wildlife documentary”, but it might be more apt to say that Rettenberger is regarded more as a lab specimen than a creature in the wild (literally so in an early scene in which he wires himself up for a diagnostic at a hi-tech running clinic).

And it's here, in the essential containment of its sure-fire scenario, that *The Robber*'s attractive ambiguity begins to seem engineered, to shade over into the cannily uncommitted. Refusing to fit Rettenberger into any one interpretive mould, to reduce the range of potential meanings in his inchoate rebellion, Heisenberg goes too far in the other direction: he fetishises the lack that he himself has created in his main character, elevates absence of meaning into a meaning unto itself. Even as it strips him down, *The Robber* puffs Rettenberger up; and when Rettenberger tells Erika of a recurring dream in which he is dead but suddenly returns to life – “just to resist” – one can clearly detect the mythic bloat disfiguring the film's otherwise fast and lean frame. ☀

Rettenberger is incarnated by Andreas Lust with cold intelligence and the uniquely sickly athleticism of the endurance runner

call life,” Rettenberger darkly says to girlfriend Erika in one of the film’s more portentous (not to mention on-the-nose) lines, in an expression of – and a fierce, conscious commitment to – his own fundamental unreadability. (Indeed, Rettenberger’s only moments of true perturbation, beyond his purely animal desperation while he’s being hunted by the police, are when he experiences common human emotions: he confesses to jealousy on seeing Erika talking with another man, and his one act of sudden, impulsive violence is, tellingly, committed shortly after she has thrown him out of her apartment.)

Yet even as Rettenberger refuses to make himself legible in terms of life-as-we-call-it, his very refusal is knit into the larger social matrix that he rejects. Surrounded by systems of surveillance – the prison walls confining him, the security cameras that record his thefts, the media reporting on his crimes, the helicopter tracking his vehicular flight as the dragnet closes around him – Rettenberger paradoxically seeks to thwart them through both extreme anonymity (his rubber-faced disguise the corollary of his general abstention from social contact) and outrageous publicity (his out-of-nowhere

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Nikolaus Geyharter
Markus Glaser
Michael Kitzberger
Wolfgang Widerhofer
Peter Heirlath
Written by
Benjamin Heisenberg
Martin Prinz
Adapted from Martin Prinz's novel
Based on a true story
Director of Photography

Reinhold Vorschneider

Editing
Andrea Wagner
Benjamin Heisenberg
Art Director
Renate Schmaderer
Music
Lorenz Dangel
Sound
Marc Parisotto
Costume Designer
Stephanie Riess
©Nikolaus Geyharter

Filmproduktion,

Peter Heirlath
Filmproduktion/ZDF
Production Companies
Nikolaus Geyharter
Filmproduktion,
Peter Heirlath
Filmproduktion
A film by Benjamin Heisenberg
With the support of Österreichische Filmstiftung,

Filmfonds Wien,

Filmfernsehfonds
Bayern, Land
Niederösterreich,
Filmförderungsanstalt
in co-operation with
ORF (Film-Fernseh-Abkommen)
in co-production with
ZDF/Das Kleine Fernsehspiel
in co-operation with ARTE

CAST

Andreas Lust
Johann Rettenberger
Franziska Weisz
Erika
Markus Schleinzer
parole officer
Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor

Filmhouse
9.127ft +8 frames
Austrian/German
theatrical title
Der Räuber

Austria, present day. Johann Rettenberger is serving a jail term for attempted armed robbery. During his imprisonment he has honed his abilities as a long-distance runner, encouraged by the prison psychologist, who hopes that his commitment to running will aid his rehabilitation. Shortly after his release on parole, Rettenberger enters into a relationship with Erika, a woman he knew before his conviction, and returns to his parallel careers of marathon running and robbing banks. He wins a number of high-profile marathons and, disguised in a hoodie and rubber mask and wielding a shotgun, commits a series of daring daylight robberies.

Having ignored his parole requirements, Rettenberger is confronted after a race by the prison

psychologist; in a sudden fit of anger, Rettenberger clubs the man with his marathon trophy, killing him. On the run, Rettenberger asks Erika for help. Thinking that she is doing what's best for him, she informs the police, who arrest Rettenberger at her apartment. Rettenberger escapes from the police station and takes off on foot through the woods on the outskirts of the city. He takes an elderly man hostage in his suburban home in order to steal his car; his captive manages to stab him in the torso with a penknife. Rettenberger drives on to the highway, eluding a police helicopter and slowly dying from his wound. He pulls over to the side of the road and phones Erika. As he dies, she tells him that she loves him.



Saint with a six-gun: Saleh Bakri as Christ-like hitman Salvo

Salvo

Italy/France 2013

Directors: Fabio Grassadonia, Antonio Piazza

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

This debut feature by two well-established screenwriters is what Jean Cocteau would have called a “full orchestration” of the theme picked out on the piano in their debut short *Rita* (2010). In the short, Rita is a ten-year-old blind girl living in Palermo with her tyrannical mother; she’s given a taste of happiness by a young intruder who takes her out to the sea. The feature’s Rita is a grown-up blind woman who lives in Palermo with her Mafioso brother and reportedly never leaves the house; when hitman Salvo breaks in to kill the brother, he spares her life and spirits her away to a temporary sanctuary where she regains her sight and eventually forgives him for the murder. The man’s name ‘Salvo’ brings in more than a hint of allegory: ‘*sano e salvo*’ means safe and sound, and this Salvo does indeed bring Rita a kind of salvation.

But the film doesn’t feel like a Catholic allegory, any more than it feels like a standard-model Mafia thriller or, for that matter, a standard lone hitman mood piece. It does open with a scene

that parallels the start of Jean-Pierre Melville’s *Le Samouraï* (1967) – hitman alone on his bed in a bare room before going out to work – but replaces the cage-bird, the faux-oriental wisdom and the glamorous narcissism with a broken-down air-conditioner and a heatwave. Overall, it has even less dialogue than Melville’s film and is far less cluttered with characters and detail. (It may, though, echo Melville’s perception that “a hired killer is by definition schizophrenic”.) It owes next to nothing either to the Francesco Rosi tradition of the true-life Cosa Nostra movie or a latter-day descendant like Matteo Garrone’s *Gomorrah*. Salvo’s elderly boss does note at one point how hard things have become (he hides from assassins’ bullets in a deep cellar) and there’s a general sense that the good times are long gone, but the cops get only the briefest look-in and there’s no obvious attempt to sketch any broader social context for the action.

It’s easy enough to note what *Salvo* isn’t, but harder to define exactly what it is. One obvious key is the motif of blindness, echoed by the many scenes shot in darkness or half-light, although Rita’s miraculous recovery is given no more emphasis than anything else. Directors Grassadonia and Piazza twice use agreeably lo-tech visual effects to ‘dramatise’ the return of Rita’s sight. When Salvo spreads his palm across her face (repeating the gesture he used

to execute a man a little earlier) we see the first glimmerings of light from her point of view: the spaces between his fingers are rendered as abstract white shapes invading a field of black, resembling a fuzzier version of a Viking Eggeling animation from the 1920s. Then later, when Salvo forces Rita to face the light, by tearing down the ‘curtains’ she has improvised in her temporary refuge, we share her first glimpses of his blurred, indistinct face. But neither of them questions or comments on the magical effect of his laying-on of hands; she simply loses her facial tics and begins to behave like any other common-or-garden abducted woman, screaming “What do you want from me?” at her abductor.

Like an earlier insert-shot of Salvo’s breakfast (fish and loaves, natch), this matter-of-fact presentation of a miracle points the film back in the direction of Biblical allegory, even if little else supports it. Redemption clearly is on the agenda: Salvo’s decision to ‘save’ Rita rather than observe the Mafia code by executing her is a ‘born-again’ moment, the first sign that he is turning away from his former life. The curious couple who minister to his domestic needs soon notice the change: he sleeps on their sofa rather than in his own room and installs himself in their kitchen for breakfast. Does he suddenly feel closer to ‘ordinary’ people, or is he simply taking sensible precautions against a reprisal



In a way the film harks back to the golden age of European art cinema, the time of 'L'avventura' and 'Last Year in Marienbad', in its refusal to explain

attack? Again, the film is deliberately elusive. Salvo, taciturn throughout, says nothing at all about thinking or feeling differently, and his escape from the lodging-house to stay with Rita is accomplished with the same silent Mafioso efficiency – he shimmies over a back wall to evade a waiting car – that he brought to his previous pursuit of an attacker.

So the directors leave us to make our own inferences and draw our own conclusions about a man who (spoiler alert!) ultimately lays down his own life that another may live. There's a scattering of small indications about what goes on in Salvo's mind: he wakes before his alarm goes off, he doesn't want to hear radio reports about the effects of the heatwave on Palermo's power supply, and he becomes irrationally enraged when a junior member of the gang plays loud pop music on a car stereo. But the main clue to the character perhaps lies in the casting of the role.

Saleh Bakri, who plays Salvo, has the slim, hard-bodied, rough-trade look of many Dolce & Gabbana models. His brooding screen presence lends credence to the notion that the character is a self-sufficient, introverted loner, ripe for the realisation that the endless round of tit-for-tat killings is without meaning. Salvo is established in the opening scenes as a watchful observer – of his own alarm-clock, of approaching vehicles which may contain assassins – but the ten-minute sequence in which he watches the blind Rita move around her home suggests that he awakens to a different kind of seeing. He apparently contrasts the rather pitiable figure before him with the more serene figure he sees in her framed photo in an upstairs room. Is this the spark that makes him decide to save her, even after she tries to warn her brother that an assassin is waiting for him?

In a way the film harks back to the golden age of European art cinema, the time of *L'avventura* and *Last Year in Marienbad*, in its refusal to explain and its presumption that viewers will be interested and alert enough to scan the images for clues and interpret (or intuit) meanings. It's certainly notable that two guys known primarily as writers should come up with something so non-verbal for their directing debut. They finesse their strategy in the lengthy Steadicam shots of Rita and Salvo wandering around the house – with Salvo sometimes glimpsed in the background of Rita's shots – which give the illusion that the sequence unfolds in real time. You could read the sequence as the

directors' idiosyncratic take on 'Slow Cinema', but the *tempo morto* pacing – there's just a tinge of suspense to compensate for the overt lack of drama and narrative thrust – turns out to be a purely visual expression of Salvo's murky transition from hitman to saviour. That's no doubt why Salvo's killing of his target at the end of the sequence occurs offscreen.

The film won something called the 'Grand Prix Nespresso' when it premiered in the Semaine de la Critique (an unofficial sidebar in Cannes) last year, so it clearly does speak to some viewers. Others may find it too evasive for its own good. Actually, the very first shot announces the strengths and weaknesses of the concept. Shimmering veils of blue light with a distant pulse of industrial noise on the soundtrack slowly come into focus as curtains over a backlit window, with a defunct portable air-conditioner in the foreground. The shot goes from abstract to concrete, rather beautifully, but ultimately signifies nothing. As a chronicle of redemption, the film is no better or worse defined. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Massimo Cristaldi
Fabrizio Mosca

Written by

Fabio Grassadonia

Antonio Piazza

Director of Photography

Daniele Cipri

Editing

Desideria Rayner

Production Designer

Marco Dentici

Production Sound Mixer

Guillaume Sciamma

Costume Designer

Mariano Tufano

Stunt Co-ordinator

Gianluca Petrazzi

©Acaba Produzioni, Cristaldi Pictures, Mact Productions, Cite Films, Production Companies

Massimo Cristaldi and Fabrizio Mosca present an Acaba

Produzioni, Cristaldi

Pictures production

in co-production with

Luigi Lo Cascio
Enzo Puleo

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Peccadillo Pictures

CAST

Saleh Bakri
Salvo
Sara Serraiocco
Rita
Mario Pupella
boss
Giuditta Perriera
Mimma Puleo

Palermo, during a 40C heatwave. Mafia hitman Salvo Mancuso is being driven to a job when the car comes under attack in a well-planned ambush. At least one man dies in the shootout, but Salvo manages to corner another attacker and extract the name of his employer (Renato Pizzuto) before executing him. Salvo sneaks into Pizzuto's home in his absence, and becomes fascinated by the man's blind sister Rita as she moves around the house. Pizzuto returns and is killed by Salvo. Salvo buries Pizzuto's corpse but on impulse spares Rita and locks her up in a disused factory building outside the city. He tells his elderly boss (based in a cellar deep underground) that both Pizzuto siblings are dead. Rita furiously protests her confinement, but when she realises that Salvo wishes her no harm she begins to soften towards him; her eyesight magically returns. Salvo starts behaving in uncharacteristic ways. At night, while the couple who look after him are asleep, he sneaks away to hide with Rita. His boss tracks him to the factory building and demands that he surrender Rita. He holes up instead and under cover of dark manages to sneak Rita out, although he sustains a bullet wound in his torso in the process. Rita declines to be smuggled out of Sicily on a boat. She helps Salvo back to her former home and sits with him facing the sea for many hours until he dies.



Mario Pupella as Salvo's Mafia boss



Leading by the knows: Donald Rumsfeld in Errol Morris's *The Unknown Known*, which investigates the career of the controversial former US defence secretary

The Unknown Known The Rules and Memos of Donald Rumsfeld

USA/United Kingdom 2013
Director: Errol Morris

Reviewed by Nick Bradshaw

Movies are not courts of law, and as repositories for historical deposition they suffer from the fact that their protagonists may have motivations before and below our pursuit of 'the truth'.

The Unknown Known is Errol Morris's second sit-down with a suspected war criminal, and – I know from parsing some criticisms of 2012's *The Act of Killing*, which Morris executive-produced – the weak of stomach should be forewarned that former US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld is not chained in stocks during the course of the film, does not break down in tears of contrition, and indeed appears considerably more ready to spar than does his interrogator. (At one point he gloats to Morris, "I'll chalk that

one up" having batted off a question about "all these torture memos" with a mazy spiel that ends with a reminder that "enhanced interrogation" was signed off by an Attorney General "overwhelmingly" confirmed by Congress.) And while he doesn't quite garb himself as Davy Crockett and break out in a chorus of 'Born Free', he certainly never lets go of his infernal Cheshire Cat grin and homespun-American oh-my-goodness persona, unless you count a brief release of crocodile tears as he remembers the faith of the wife of a vet who survived near-mortal wounds. In short, anyone who was underage or otherwise incognisant in the years 2001–06, when Rumsfeld co-sponsored the trashing of Iraq and countless norms of democracy and law, could walk away from this film under the misapprehension that he would have little to answer for at the International Criminal Court, even were he not a member of a political class that will never send him there. But the charge sheet is already well established, and Morris, a private eye in a former life, goes light on the forensics, declining to devote this encounter to coaxing from Rumsfeld the same old

lies (though we certainly get the basics). "I think you're probably, Errol, chasing the wrong rabbit here," Rumsfeld wraps up with a chuckle, before signing off with a claim of complete ignorance of what he's been doing sitting for this film at all.

We have of course been here before. Rumsfeld holds the distinction of having been both the youngest and oldest defence secretary in American history, having overseen both the retreat from Vietnam in 1975 under President Ford and the would-be neocon rectification, a quarter of a century later, of that frustration of American hard power. Early in the aftermath of the Iraq invasion, Morris released *The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara* (2003),

The weak of stomach should be forewarned that Donald Rumsfeld is not chained in stocks during the film, nor does he break down in tears of contrition

may remember the referent of the film's title: a bizarre oration Rumsfeld launched into during a press conference in 2002 in response to an inquiry about evidence linking Iraq to weapons of mass destruction, in which he offered a kind of epistemic taxonomy: there are known knowns, known unknowns and unknown unknowns – meaning, then, how do *you* know we're wrong? The film opens with Rumsfeld's own definition of the missing fourth quadrant of his schema, the unknown known – "things that you think you know that it turns out you did not". This might scan as an apt definition of hubris but is of course intended as his very own fog-of-war paradigm: a description of the fallibility of political decision-making in the moment and a retrospective obfuscation of the readily available wisdom of caution ignored by Bush's heedless warmongers – how were *we* to know we were wrong?

Rumsfeld bombards us with his special brand of exculpatory scepticism: "Stuff happens"; "Everything seems amazing in retrospect"; "Wouldn't it be wonderful if you could see around corners?" Did he learn a lesson from (the withdrawal from) Vietnam, Morris asks? "One would hope most things that happen in life prove to be lessons. Some things work out, some don't. If that's a lesson, then yes." Mark Danner has detailed in the *New York Review of Books* what September 11 unknowns the Bush administration might better have known had they listened to the alerts coming from their intelligence staff – and the links between Iraq and al-Qaeda could never be heard with a straight face. The weird thing – and perhaps Rumsfeld's tragedy – is that the wisdom he rejected was often his own.

Much of the film takes off from samples Morris has Rumsfeld read from his 'snowflakes' – the thousands of memos he dictated for himself in his years in office. A particularly salient 1983 instance entitled 'The Swamp', lending Reagan advice as special envoy to the Middle East in the wake of the Beirut barracks bombing, counselled less American visibility in the region: America should "keep reminding ourselves it's easier to get into something than it is to get out of it... I promise you will never hear out of my mouth the phrase 'The US seeks a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.'" A particularly remarkable July 2001 'snowflake' didn't so much hypothesise as prophesy that he'd one day end up on a panel of inquest "in a modern day version of a Pearl Harbor post-mortem". "A month before September 11, it would be wrong to think that someone who wrote it, namely me, was prescient," he tells Morris with typically tortuous Janus-facedness.

Yet he can't resist the bluff and bluster that had him tell the world when it mattered: "We know [the Iraqis] have... weapons of mass destruction – there isn't any debate about it." Saddam "would undoubtedly" have gained nuclear weapons within a few years, he tells Morris, and – conferring on American decision-making the status of immutable force of God – wonders why the Iraqis didn't respond to "all the efforts that were made to avoid that war. How could they be mixed up in what the inevitable next steps would be? Why wouldn't they sit down and have an agonising reappraisal and come to some logical conclusion?" (We also hear Rumsfeld's philosophy of American strength, a force, he says, for peace and stability in the world: "Who do we want to provide leadership? Someone else?" – an interesting question, but not one that answers itself.)

The comedy grows most incongruous in

Rumsfeld's obsession with the dictionary, a kind of pre-modernist riff on the PR of postmodern politics. "Memo: define 'several'." "Memo: define 'scapegoat'." He makes a list of his accomplishments at the Pentagon, which include outlawing the words 'requirement' and 'readiness'; 'quagmire', unsurprisingly, was another target for suppression. Since his public resignation, Rumsfeld has busied himself parlaying his memos and musings into *Rumsfeld's Rules*, a collection of fortune-cookie koans for credulous leaders. "The only thing that should be surprising is that we continue to be surprised," instructs a typical example on the homepage of rumsfeld.com. "All generalisations are false. Including this one," he loss-leads in the film, with the self-impressed twinkle of your drunken uncle at Christmas dinner. Later he tries his hand at Shakespearean epithets: "Something's neither good nor bad but thinking makes it so."

"What does it matter what you say about people?" Marlene Dietrich wondered at the end of *Touch of Evil* (1958), after the do-gooders had hounded Hank Quinlan through the mud and finally felled him. Morris had already done much of his talking about Bush's lawless neocons from the bottom up in *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008), his pawns-of-history peer behind the surfaces of the Abu Ghraib torture photos. Given the linguistic surrealism on the loose in this great-man chamber drama, he keeps his visuals straightforward and pared-back, with occasional cutaway counterpoints to Rumsfeld's claims, a grab-bag of SFX fantasias and a steady drift of superimposed dictionary entries.

At the film's close, Morris has Rumsfeld revisit the phrase of the title and realise that he's always had it backwards: unknown knowns aren't false but hidden (or buried) knowledge, things "that you may know that you don't know you know". The elusive rabbit in *The Unknown Known*, more than our knowledge of this glassily paradoxical man, more than his knowledge of himself, is our knowledge of knowledge itself, bid down the hole by the dissembling of him and his kind. As the man says, "I'm working my way over to figuring out how I won't answer that." ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Errol Morris
Robert Fernandez
Amanda Branson Gill

Director of Photography

Robert Chappell
Edited by

Steven Hathaway

Production Designers

Ted Bafaloukos

Music by/Score

Jeremy Landman

Produced by

Danny Elfman

Supervising Sound Editor

Skip Lievsay

©DHR Project, LLC
and A&E Television
Networks, LLC

Production Companies

History Films
and Participant
Media present in
association with

Radius/TWC

In association
with Sky Atlantic

Produced by

Moxie Pictures for

History Films

Executive Producers

Celia Taylor

Angus Wall

Julia Sheehan

Tom Quinn
Jason Janego
Josh Braun
Jeff Skol
Diane Weyermann
Dirk Hoogstra
Julian P. Hobbs
Molly Thompson

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Dogwoof

Filmmaker Errol Morris's interview with the two-time US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld, who oversaw the US retreat from Vietnam in 1975 and was in office when US troops went into Afghanistan and Iraq following the World Trade Center attacks of 2001. Speaking through Morris's 'interrottron' camera, Rumsfeld reflects on his career and its controversies, relates his philosophy of political power and its limits, and reads from a sample of his many memos from his time in office.

an elegant collaboration with the square-jawed 'Whiz Kid' defence secretary of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations who enjoined LBJ to escalate massively the Vietnam War and carpet-bomb the region's civilians. McNamara's attempt to amend his accommodation with history involved a combination of technocratic defiance and ostentatious but limited confessions of anguish, along with pedagogic case studies of the shortcomings of the science of total warfare. Would we have had Rumsfeld and Cheney (his more serpentine protégé-turned-patron, whose relationship with Rumsfeld is one of the more glaring lacunae in *The Unknown Known*) had the Vietnam bombers not enjoyed legal impunity? The question continues to be kicked down the road; certainly Rumsfeld, sounding like Howard Hawks expressing his disdain for Gary Cooper's character's sheepishness in *High Noon*, seems to have scorned *The Fog of War*, stoutly telling Morris "that man had nothing to apologise for". *Je ne regrette rien*.

In lieu of tragedy, then, Rumsfeld plays his non-confessional as black, semi-wilful farce. You

About Last Night

USA 2014
Director: Steve Pink
Certificate 15 100m 7s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

About Last Night is the third iteration of material that began as David Mamet's 1974 play *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, which was then filmed in 1986 by Edward Zwick with Rob Lowe and Demi Moore. What remains is the basic premise of two couples who begin dating at the same time and who happen to be best buddies/girlfriends and workmates/roommates. Both couples go through their make-ups and break-ups, and each keeps a running commentary on the other as they pass during their teeter-tottering ups and downs.

Joy Bryant and the very handsome Michael Ealy play one of the couples, Danny and Debbie. The others, Joan and Bernie, are played by Regina Hall and Kevin Hart, the runty, satyr-like comedian whose rapport with audiences is so strong that he can make a hit of thoroughly asinine material like the action comedy *Ride Along*.

The screenplay is the work of Lesley Headland, who wrote and directed last year's girls-behaving-badly film *Bachelorette*, and it was directed for the screen by Steve Pink, of *Hot Tub Time Machine* fame. Pink deserves credit for the film's buoyant pace which, while making use of overlapping dialogue and ping-pong back-and-forth patter, never comes up winded or forced. And while *About Last Night* is every bit as raunchy as *Bachelorette*, there's no sense of self-satisfied naughtiness – the movie bounds along too fleetly to let that set in.

Most of the blue material here is the property of Hall and Hart, who do an awfully good impression of riffing even if they are on-script. The entire basis of Bernie and Joan's relationship is an ongoing take-no-prisoners exchange of insults – continually heaping abuse on each other until they collapse in a fit of laughter and fall straight into bed for another round of always problematic, always ambitiously contortionist sex. As always, Hart runs his mouth like he's trying for a words-per-minute record, but I've never seen him quite this appealing. In large part this is because he's doing scenes with a partner rather than *at a* partner, and that partner is every bit his equal. Hall is more than a sounding board for schtick; a veteran of the *Scary Movie* franchise, she's a gifted comedienne, and she and Hart seem to have the



The fling ring: Michael Ealy, Joy Bryant

same competitive badinage their characters do.

While one couple plays heartbreak for farce, the other plays it for tragedy. The breakout star of 2002's *Barbershop*, Ealy is still selling himself with those blue eyes, but what makes an impression here is his knack for hiding a wince behind a smile – that is, acting. He and Bryant manage to combine the qualities of seeming unguarded and familiar while also being impossibly good-looking. This particular combination is called old-fashioned star power – and while it seems odd to use the term 'old-fashioned' to describe any part of a movie so inventively bawdy as to refer to cunnilingus as "wearing the thigh mask", the term somehow fits.

This extends to the almost soundstage quality of the shooting. *About Last Night*'s exteriors seem to focus on about two square blocks of downtown Los Angeles, while most of the action takes place in Danny's catalogue-spread loft. It's a modest range of territory for a movie of modest ambitions. *About Last Night* is the sort of well-turned middle-range movie the world has never been left any the worse by, a benevolent trifle that promises and delivers a giggle and a sniffle. ☀

Back to Front Peter Gabriel Live

United Kingdom 2014, Director: Hamish Hamilton
Certificate PG 97m 34s

Reviewed by Sam Davies

If there's one thing that might be expected of *Back to Front Peter Gabriel Live* it's that it would be spectacular. Gabriel has a long history of elaborately theatrical staging, dating all the way back to the mid-70s and his time in Genesis. During the period in which the band toured its 1974 album *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway*, audiences would be treated to the sight of Gabriel, in costume as a monster with inflatable genitalia, being 'born' from an enormous phallic tube. He was, as he himself admits in interview here with a proud cackle, a direct model for some of *This Is Spinal Tap*'s silliest live scenes. And *Back to Front*'s director Hamish Hamilton, who also directed Gabriel's 2003 concert film *Growing Up Live*, has a CV that suggests, if nothing else, a flawless preparation for dealing with multimedia spectacles, having previously handled the Brit Awards, the Oscars and the Super Bowl half-time show.

In fact *Back to Front* is a rather low-key, almost humble affair – if that makes any sense when talking about a concert film shot at London's cavernous O2 arena. It begins unobtrusively, without fanfare or big entrances: the house lights are up and Gabriel is sitting at the piano as though tinkering with a new song during a lull in a soundcheck – and the lights stay up for the first few songs, as if to acclimatise the audience to the idea that they're at a gig. The lighting comes from a backline of six spots mounted on immense booms, which duck and swoop over the stage like strange long-necked birds, sometimes menacingly, sometimes protectively. They're starkly white for much of the set, which builds towards a run-through of Gabriel's massively successful 1986 album *So*, when they saturate the stage with colour (taking their cue from songs such as 'Red Rain').

Lights aside, though, there is a utilitarian feel to *Back to Front* visually. The members of Gabriel's backing group (the same musicians who toured with him after the release of *So*) are dressed in a uniform of murky overalls, while Gabriel himself wears a monkish hooded smock. The overall look is that of escapees from the prison-foundry planet of David Fincher's *Aliens 3*. The most impressive technical aspect has nothing to do with the staging, but instead the pin-sharp clarity of the high-definition cinematography.

Nostalgia is perhaps the most surprising element in *Back to Front*, Gabriel having always had an obsessive distaste for repeating himself. At this point the performance of a landmark album in full by its creator or creators has become a fairly fixed feature of the live-music landscape. Even underground reference points such as Slint and My Bloody Valentine have done it, while Gabriel's 70s contemporaries Sparks have played a series of concerts in which they have worked systematically through their entire discography, one album per night. Here Hamilton and Gabriel indulge in carefully administered doses of reminiscence, weaving in snippets of interviews with the group (Tony Levin, David Rhodes, David Sancious and Manu Katché), in which they mostly chatter appreciatively about each other's musicianship and recall touring in the 80s. There are also two songs, 'Solsbury

Credits and Synopsis

Produced By

Will Packer
Will Gluck

Screenplay

Leslie Headland
Based on the
screenplay by
Tim Kazurinsky,
Denise DeClue
Based upon Sexual
Perversity in Chicago
by David Mamet

Director of Photography

Michael Barrett

Editors

Tracey Wadmore-
Smith

Shelly Westerman

Production Designer

Jon Gary Steele

Music

Marcus Miller

Production Mixer

Steve Morrow
Costume Designer

Ann Foley

©Screen Gems, Inc.

Production Companies

Screen Gems
presents a Rainforest
Films/Olive Bridge
Entertainment
production

Executive Producers

Glenn S. Gairor
Alicia Ermrich

CAST

Kevin Hart

Bernie

Michael Ealy

Danny

Regina Hall

Joan

Joy Bryant

Debbie
Christopher
McDonald

Casey McNeil

Adam Rodriguez

Steven Thaler

Joe Lo Truglio

Ryan Keller

Paula Patton

Alison

Dolby Digital/ Datasat/SDDS

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Sony Pictures

Releasing

9,010ft +8 frames

Los Angeles, present day. Bernie takes his co-worker Danny, who is still shy after a recent heartbreak, on a double date. Bernie's date is Joan, whom he recently met on a drunken night out; Joan brings her friend and roommate Debbie. Bernie and Joan get drunk and have sex in the bathroom; Debbie spends the night at Danny's apartment. Both couples begin dating, but while Bernie and Joan's constant bickering leads to a break-up, Danny and Debbie move in together, even buying a puppy. However, Danny is deeply unhappy in his work; he quits his job and becomes even more introverted and insecure. Danny and Debbie admit their mutual misery, and she moves back in with Joan, who has secretly renewed her relationship with Bernie. Danny invests in the renovation of a family friend's bar, becomes a partner in the business and in the process finds a new, secure professional identity. After trying unsuccessfully to reopen communication with Debbie, he runs into her while walking the dog. They make plans to go on a date, strolling through the park arm in arm.



Gift of the Gab: Peter Gabriel

Hill' and 'Sledgehammer', that are allowed a kind of archival, archaeological depth; as the contemporary O2 shots are shuffled with footage of the same musicians playing the same songs over the previous decades, there's an undeniable poignancy to seeing the passage of time, which works particularly well on 'Solsbury Hill', with its Wordsworthian lyrical undercurrents.

As songs, these two stand out for the joy they take in pop simplicity. Gabriel's solo career essentially left behind the competitive complexity of 70s progressive rock but traces of it remain – here in the knotty abstraction of tracks such as 'We Do What We're Told (Milgram's 37)' from *So* and also in the previously unreleased 'Why Don't You Show Yourself' – a meditation on God's existence using hunting metaphors, which, as Gabriel explains in voiceover, was written for Guillermo Arriaga (screenwriter of *Amores Perros*, *21 Grams* and *The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada*). 

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Katy Mullan
Joss Crowley

Created by

Peter Gabriel
Rob Sinclair
Blue Leach
Director of Photography

Brett Turnbull

Online Editor

Chris Young

Tour Production

Conceived/

Designed by

Rob Sinclair
Peter Gabriel

Music

Peter Gabriel

Audio Recorded/

Mixed by

Ben Findlay

Richard Chappell

Clothing

Designed by

Nicola Pelly

©Peter Gabriel

Ltd & Real World
Productions Ltd

Production Companies

A Done+Dusted / Real World
production for Eagle Rock Film
Productions

Executive Producers

Mike Large
Ian Stewart

Geoffrey Kempin

Terry Shand

WITH

the band

Peter Gabriel

Manu Katché

Tony Levin

David Rhodes

David Sancious

Jennie Abrahamson

A concert film documenting Peter Gabriel in performance at London's O2 arena in October 2013. The set list includes new songs alongside hits such as 'Solsbury Hill' and 'Biko' and also a run-through of Gabriel's multi-platinum 1986 album 'So', performed with the same musicians who toured with him in the 1980s.

Linnea Olsson

supported by
Jennie Abrahamson

Linnea Olsson

special guest
Daby Touré

In Colour

Distributor

More2Screen

8,781ft +0 frames

Back to the Garden

United Kingdom 2013

Director: Jon Sanders

Certificate 12A 95m 1s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Back to the Garden is the third in Jon Sanders's 'Kent trilogy', all shot (on minuscule budgets) in the north-easternmost coastal corner of Kent. *Low Tide* (2008) covers the last three days of a woman who's dying of cancer, and in *Late September* (2012) a group of friends and family assemble at the house of one of their number to celebrate his 65th birthday. All three films are concerned with memory, loss and the messiness of emotional entanglements, and share several of the same actors, in particular Anna Mottram (Sanders's partner and co-writer), Bob Goody and Charlotte Palmer. Dialogue is improvised by the cast and the shooting style is minimal to the point of austerity, with extensive use of natural light and long, mainly fixed-angle takes. Sanders avoids close-ups, and DP David Scott, shooting on digital video, restricts his camera movement to occasional slow pans left or right. Non-diegetic music (by Douglas Finch) is used sparingly, in brief snatches.

Tide and *September* both led up to a death: of the cancer-sufferer in the first film and an implied suicide in the second. In *Back to the Garden* the death is in the past: that of Ivan, an inspirational theatre director and teacher who died a year ago. Friends and colleagues, mostly with theatre connections, gather at the house where he lived to help his widow Maggie mourn and celebrate him, and to bury his ashes in the garden. Initially it seems that Maggie (Emma Garden) will be the main focus of events but soon the emphasis shifts to Jack (Goody), a successful actor and compulsive flirt, whose serial philanderings are threatening the stability of his long-term marriage to Julia (Mottram). She tries to make light of the situation, teasing him, but her patience is wearing thin and, as a dreamlike sequence early in the film suggests, they're ineluctably drifting apart. Jack, meanwhile, declares to Stella (Tanya Myers), his latest flirtee, that this time it's different, he's in love with her – though one suspects he tells that to all the girls.

The film intermittently suffers from the weakness endemic to improvised-dialogue movies, of diffuseness and repetition; one scene in particular, in which Maggie and her



Woman on the verge: Emma Garden

female friends discuss how far the dead can 'live on' in those who knew them, goes on rather too long and round in circles. But the overall mood of melancholy and regret, of lives winding down (unfashionably, Sanders is mainly concerned with the older generation), is convincing and quietly compelling. The use of natural light, especially the half-lights of dawn and dusk, is subtly evocative in its delicacy of tone, and Sanders, as befits a former sound recordist, makes sensitive use of sound effects in mainly outdoor locations where wind and the lap of water provide an aural backdrop.

Garden moves at its own unassertive pace and, like its two companion films, takes a little while to get into. But it repays patience with the warmth and authenticity of its portrayals and elements of ironic humour – not least Jack's infinite talent for self-deception. Once again Sanders and his team have turned their micro-budget to advantage. 

Credits and Synopsis

Story Devised by

Anna Mottram
Jon Sanders
Dialogue improvised
by the cast

Director of Photography

David Scott

Editor

Georgius Misura
Jon Sanders

Music Composed by

Douglas Finch

Sound Recordists

Jeroen Bogaert

Karel van Bellingen

©Jon Sanders Films

CAST

Anna Mottram
Julia
Bob Goody

Jack

Emma Garden

Maggie
Charlotte Palmer

Maxine

Tanya Myers

Stella

Penny

Richard Garaghty

Ed
Stephen Lowe

Ivan

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Verve Pictures

8,551ft +8 frames

East Kent, present day. A year after the death of theatre director Ivan, friends are invited to the house of his widow Maggie to celebrate his memory and bury his ashes. They are Penny, an old friend of Maggie's; Jack, an actor, and his wife Julia; Maxine and Ed, who met at Ivan's funeral and are now enjoying an intermittent affair; and Stella, an actress who has recently been working with Jack.

Maxine and Ed enjoy a get-together on Maggie's boat, which is about to be sold. Julia, while cutting Jack's hair, teases him about his flirtations with younger actresses, Stella being the latest. Jack collects Stella from the station and confesses that he's in love with her; she tells him she can't reciprocate.

Maggie and the other women discuss bereavement, memory and the possibility of an afterlife. Jack digs a hole for the urn, supervised by Penny. Ed confides in Julia about his affair with Maxine, who's married. Jack tells Maxine (another of his former 'girlfriends') that he's in love with Stella. Julia talks with Stella, who urges her to tell Jack her real feelings; Julia weeps. She later tells Jack that she won't stop him leaving her if he wants to. As dusk falls, an outdoor entertainment is staged in Ivan's memory. Ed and Maxine perform a plate-spinning act; Stella sings 'After You've Gone'; Maggie and Julia perform a Grecian dance; Jack reads a poem he's written about Ivan. They bury the urn and everyone goes into the house.

BAFTA Shorts 2014

United Kingdom/Poland 2012-2013

Directors: various

Certificate 15 123m 37s

Reviewed by Dylan Cave

Last spring, when the 2013 Bafta-nominated shorts toured the UK, they picked up a degree of criticism and sparked heated discussion about the health of British short filmmaking. This in turn introduced a welcome discussion of the form into wider debates about British cinema, albeit momentarily, so it is pleasing to see the release of this year's Bafta nominations in a similar package. It remains to be seen whether this new bunch will raise hackles in quite the same way.

One noticeable difference between this year's list and last year's is a subtle shift in the types of short film nominated. Where last year's eventual Bafta winners – Will Anderson's *The Making of Longbird* and Lynne Ramsey's *Swimmer* – were openly experimental in form, many of this year's offerings seem to be fired by the challenges of genre. Perhaps the prime example of this is Jamie Stone's space-set love story *Orbit Ever After*, the first film in the bunch, in which teenage lonely-heart Nigel (Thomas Brodie-Sangster) is desperate to escape the claustrophobic pod he shares with his family as it circles the edge of Earth's orbit. Stone's film is epic genre filmmaking in miniature, the zero-gravity aesthetic and *Gravity*-like exteriors all the more impressive considering the budget. At times the dialogue is a little flat – Mackenzie Crook's witty one-liners are too few – but the accomplished effects, created largely in camera, are astonishing.

Sleeping with the Fishes is the first animation in the package. A National Film and Television School graduation short from Yousif Al-Khalifa, it tells the tale of a lonely fishmonger who surrounds herself with fish and only finds love when asked out by a deliveryman who looks like a trout. Of the three animations, *Sleeping with the Fishes* is perhaps the most conventional, but like many from the NFTS, it also feels the most fully realised.

The sole comedy in the selection, *Island Queen*, is about a woman living on a small island off the English coast. She decides on impulse that she wants to have a baby and pays a visit to the local sperm bank – only to later discover that the sperm donor is probably her brother. *Island Queen* doesn't appear to be quite as well resourced as the other films in the anthology, with some shots and the odd thrown-away line probably needing a retake. But the witty script, written by comedian Nat Luurtsema, has a refreshingly light touch that helps to keep the film buoyant.

More studied is Jane Linfoot's *Sea View*, a sad but honest look at some of the painful lessons of adolescence. Newcomer Eloise Smyth plays teenager Jess, who is expecting a romantic weekend with an older man but soon discovers that he is only interested in cheap afternoon thrills. Smyth plays Jess beautifully, and her dawning realisation that she has been used is suitably uncomfortable and terribly heartbreaking.

We return to science fiction for *Everything I Can See from Here*, in which two men encounter a clown-like alien that quickly reveals itself to have no sense of humour. Animators Sam Taylor and Bjorn-Erik Aschim create a vivid sense of place and incredible background artwork but choose a peculiar aspect ratio, as if the film is designed

to fit the portrait view of a mobile phone. The experiment in aperture feels misplaced as it emphasises screen height over width, which works for the initial moments between the earthbound footballers and the sky-borne alien but limits the power of the wonderful landscapes.

Next comes the longest film of the compilation, *Keeping Up with the Joneses*, directed by previous Bafta nominee Michael Pearce. Written by Selina Lim, the film is an atmospheric hostage thriller with excellent performances from Maxine Peake as a disaffected MP's wife and Geoff Bell and Adeel Akhtar as her brutally indifferent captors. On the strength of this film, one hopes that Pearce and Lim will continue working together.

The final animation, *I Am Tom Moody*, is about a musician striving to overcome his childish sense of inadequacy. It's made by Ainslie Henderson, who co-wrote last year's

animation winner *The Making of Longbird*, and it shares that film's concern with the limits of creative talent. Henderson's model animation is exquisite, with sensitive attention to the eyes and faces of its lead characters, but the navel-gazing of the storyline might irritate some.

The last film, *Room 8*, returns us to science fiction. Tom Cullen plays a prisoner who finds a tiny version of his cell inside a metal box and soon realises that it is a portal through which he can escape. Writer/director James W. Griffiths is in firm control here, offsetting the grim reality of the Polish prison location with well-executed moments of fantasy, such as the prisoner touching the hand of his miniature self. That scene typifies the best moments in the package, which manage to create challenging images expertly realised on screen; one hopes that the scale of ambition on view here gets the package noticed again. Θ

Credits and Synopsis

Orbit Ever After

United Kingdom 2013

Directed by

Jamie Stone

Produced by

Chee-Lan Chan

Len Rowles

Written by

Jamie Stone

Director of Photography

Robin Whenary

Editor

James Taylor

Production Designer

Abigail Joshi

Original Music Composed by

Graham Hadfield

©The British Film Institute and No Logo Films Limited

Production Companies

BFI presents a No

Logo Films production

in association with

Humdinger Films

Produced in

consultation with

Lighthouse

Made with the

support of the

BFI's Film Fund

Cast

Thomas Brodie-Sangster

Nigel

Mackenzie Crook

father

Bronagh Gallagher

mother

Bob Goody

grandpa

Naomi Battrick

girl

[2.35:1]

Part-subtitled

Sleeping with the Fishes

United Kingdom 2013

Director

Yousif Al-Khalifa

Producer

James Walker

Writer

Sarah Woolner

Cinematographer

Timothy Chen

Editor

Johannes Bock

Production Designer

Jonathan McConnell

Composer

Matt Kelly

©National Film and Television School

Production Company

The National

Film & Television

School presents

Dolby Digital

[1.85:1]

Island Queen

United Kingdom 2012

A film by

Ben Mallaby

Producer

Emma Hughes

Directors of Photography

Georg Finch

Kirsty Smith

Soundtrack

The Last Skeptik

[none given]

Production Companies

Art Gym presents a

Ben Mallaby film

An Art Gym

production

Executive Producer

Eugene Hughes

Cast

Nat Luurtsema

Mim

Sam Pamphilon

Danny

Sam Perry

Jimmy

Lynn Gardner

mum

Kim McCroddan

dad

[1.85:1]

Sea View

United Kingdom 2012

Directed by

Jane Linfoot

Produced by

Anna Duffield

Written by

Jane Linfoot

Director of Photography

Tom Townsend

Film Editor

Matthew McKinnon

Production Designer

Alex Marden

Music

Matthew McKinnon

©The British Film Institute and Sigma

Films Limited

Production Companies

BFI presents a Sigma

Films production

A Sigma Films

production

Produced in

consultation with

Lighthouse

Made with the

support of the

BFI's Film Fund

Cast

Eloise Smyth

Jess

Ciarán Griffiths

Cast

Stephanie Fayerman

landlady

[1.85:1]

Everything I Can See from Here

United Kingdom 2013

Directed by

Sam Taylor

Björn-Erik Aschim

Produced by

Fritzi Nicolaus

Music

Box of Toys Audio

Sound

Box of Toys Audio

[none given]

Production Company

The Line

[1.29:1]

Keeping Up with the Joneses

United Kingdom 2013

Directed by

Michael Pearce

Produced by

Megan Rubens

Written by

Selina Lim

Director of Photography

Benjamin Kracun

Editors

Maya Maffioli

Immanuel von

Bennigen

Production Designer

Laura Tarrant-Brown

Composer

Stuart Earl

[none given]

Production Company

ECA – Edinburgh

College of Art

Voice Cast

Mackenzie Crook

older Tom

Jude Crook

younger Tom

Rick Webster

introduction voice

[1.85:1]

narrates a brief encounter between a teenage girl and an older man in a rainy coastal town. The animated 'Everything I Can See from Here' tells the story of two men confronted by an alien while playing football. 'Keeping Up with the Joneses' tracks the plight of an MP's wife held hostage by two of her husband's dodgy business associates. In the model animation 'I Am Tom Moody', a musician argues with his childhood self about the extent of his talent. In the final film, 'Room 8', a prisoner finds a metal box that seems to offer a chance of escape.

Room 8

United Kingdom/Poland 2013

Directed by

James W. Griffiths

Produced by

Sophie Venner

Written by

James W. Griffiths

Based on an original idea and outline script by Geoffrey Fletcher

Director of Photography

G. Magni Agustsson

Editor

Michael Aaglund

Production Designer

Peter Francis

Composer

Lennert Busch

Cast

Tom Cullen

Ives

Michael Gould

Shears

[2.35:1]

In Colour

Distributor

Independent Cinema Office

11,125 ft +8 frames

Betsy & Leonard

United Kingdom 2011
Director: Bernhard Pucher
Certificate 15 101m 0s

Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

Bernhard Pucher, director and producer of *Betsy & Leonard*, is also a house DJ and producer. His label Iron Box Music provides many of the tracks for this film about Alex, a hapless DJ/producer under house arrest at his unwilling ex's flat. With Iron Box Films as production company, the model is clearly Warp X, the Sheffield-based outfit behind such films as *Kill List* and *Donkey Punch*. Alas, the reverse-engineered plot situations and supposedly funny knob gags aspire more to *Sex Lives of the Potato Men*.

Alex's ex Karen is a masseuse and her best friend Aisha a dominatrix: cue puerile humour, with the jokes on the female characters, who have attitude rather than psychology. At one point, Karen, previously depicted as reliable and mature, assaults a variety of law-enforcement professionals without provocation, her outburst a displacement of her unacknowledged love for Alex, a manchild whose laidback crapness is, as in Judd Apatow's films, supposedly a redeeming feature. (Betsy, incidentally, is his bong.)

Making basic errors about the UK justice system – not to mention human psychology – the film spins out its sitcom episode's worth of odd-couple clichés while mocking reality TV through an invented show called *Shackled*, presented as a mirror of the protagonists' yoked-together situation.

Alex and Karen first meet at a club called Motions, whose briefly glimpsed cheesy ambience and cloacal name sum up what this film is going through. 

Sharea Samuels

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Bernhard Pucher
Raimund Berens
Screenplay
Luke Foster
Director of Photography
Luke Bryant
Editor
Nathan Haines
Production Designer
Gareth Thomas
Original Music
Roby Meola
Supervising Sound Editor
André Jacquemin
Costume
Sophie Howard

Produced by
Iron Box Films
B&L Limited
Production Company
Iron Box Films
presents a story by Luke Foster,
Bernhard Pucher
Executive Producer
Nathan Haines

CAST

Ryan Davenport
Alex
Sharea Samuels
Karen
Philippe Spall
Dave
Petra LeTang
Aisha
Aimee Berwick

Sam
Graham Bryan
Brian
Doug Cooper
Richard
Mira Dovreni
Lizzie
Jake W. Smith
PC Grant

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Kaleidoscope Film
Distribution

9,090 ft +0 frames

London, 2012. Karen, a masseuse, throws her DJ boyfriend Alex out of her flat after he accuses her of prostitution.

Six months later Alex is arrested on drugs charges and placed under house arrest at Karen's address, which he has given as his. Karen attempts to get rid of him but realises she still has feelings for him when he takes the blame following an incident in which she concusses a massage client demanding masturbation. Both tagged for assault, they share home arrest happily.

Bette Bourne It Goes with the Shoes

Directors: Jeremy Jeffs, Mark Ravenhill

Reviewed by Ben Walters

A documentary about radical alternative drag performance that starts with a conservative post-war childhood and conventional theatrical productions before going into countercultural activism, anarchist drag communes, grand-scale campy shows with hardcore political intent, an ambitious move to New York and the implosion of the commune after the arrival of heroin... This could describe *The Cockettes*, David Weissman and Bill Weber's 2002 documentary about the legendary San Francisco troupe. It also describes *Bette Bourne: It Goes with the Shoes*, but Mark Ravenhill and Jeremy Jeffs's documentary is about a single British performer and covers a wider time span in the history of post-war queer culture, and yet maintains its focus thanks to remarkable material and its main subject's weapons-grade charisma.

It Goes with the Shoes, which takes its title from a killer line Bourne once delivered in court when refusing a magistrate's instruction to remove his hat, started life as a stage production, *Bette Bourne: A Life in Three Acts*, a kind of rehearsed and illustrated conversation between Bourne and Ravenhill. It transfers well to the screen, adding to on-stage interview footage and archive photo and video material some nice location work of Bourne out and about with Ravenhill in London, where his life has always been rooted, as well as insightful interviews with fellow performers from Bloopers, the troupe he founded in 1977.

A vivid sense emerges of several stages in this unique life, the first of which is Bourne's childhood and adolescence in Hackney. Peter Bourne, as he was then, took to performance aged four, in 1943, delivering an Andrews Sisters tune at Stoke Newington town hall, which today's Bourne redelivers on the same stage in suitably juvenile tones. Later he endured physical abuse from his father but found enjoyment picking up other 'baby queens' in scripture class at school – sexuality was never a source of shame, though he recoiled then from overt effeminacy, including a very brief brush with Quentin Crisp en route to Soho.

It was only after Bourne had studied at London's Central School of Speech and Drama and had become established as a successful stage and screen actor that his sexuality informed his life outside the bedroom. Early-70s meetings of the Gay Liberation Front proved revelatory, offering vivid accounts of blackmail, prison and suicide, and a forum in which to explore experiences alien to straight culture. A new kind of drag followed – not in the name of pretending to be a woman but rather "to discover a new type of man".

Two of the film's most vivid episodes follow. One is the GLF's hijacking of Mary Whitehouse's Festival of Light, which involved raining pornography from the heavens and drag nuns doing the can-can. The other recounts the extraordinary interlude of the Notting Hill drag commune made up of Bourne and 11 others for much of the 70s; an experiment in living, making art, having sex and fobbing off the police, it would make a film in itself.

After that came Bloopers, the groundbreaking alternative drag troupe Bourne led for 25 years,



Top hat and tales: Mark Ravenhill, Bette Bourne

staging triumphant runs in New York and tours across Europe. Putting extraordinary live performance on screen is always a struggle, and the film doesn't quite manage to convey the potency of Bloopers' work with the raucous immediacy of *The Cockettes*. There are a number of other lacunae that might be usefully filled too: there's no mention, for instance, of when and why Peter became Bette, or of Hot Peaches, the New York troupe he performed with and which inspired Bloopers; and there's very little on the impact of Aids or Bourne's noteworthy career since Bloopers ended in 2002, which has included roles at the RSC, the National Theatre and the Globe.

But you can't have everything and the film's concise running time is an asset, as is its concentration on the most radical elements of Bourne's life. Ravenhill and Jeffs leave us with Bourne describing his life as a protracted chipping away at "the citadel of heterosexuality" using a pair of high heels. "If you tap long enough," he asserts, "the walls fall down..." 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Jeremy Jeffs
Written by
Mark Ravenhill
Filmed by
Jeremy Jeffs
Film Editor
David Fairhead
Music
Composed by
Sam Watts
Sound Recordists
Callum Bulmer
Mick Duffield

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
Magneto Films

A documentary about the queer activist and performer Bette Bourne, structured around an extended interview with playwright Mark Ravenhill. Bourne, often filmed at the relevant locations, recalls his working-class London upbringing, studying at the Central School of Speech and Drama, finding success as a mainstream actor, becoming involved in the Gay Liberation Front, living in a drag commune and forming the internationally successful alternative performance troupe Bloopers, which he led from 1977 to 2002.

The Borderlands

United Kingdom 2013
Director: Elliot Goldner
Certificate 15 88m 49s

Reviewed by Mar Diestro-Dópido

The fine line between faith and superstition is the fertile territory explored in Elliot Goldner's distinguished debut *The Borderlands*, a low-budget horror docu-fiction that digs convincingly deep not only into its protagonists' psyches but also into darker aspects of British history. Brother Deacon (Gordon Kennedy), a Scottish Vatican investigator with a drink problem, Father Mark (Aidan McArdle), a methodical Irish priest, and English agnostic technician Gray (Rob Hill), only in it for the money, are pitched together for the investigation of a suspected paranormal visitation in a remote church somewhere in the west of England.

So far so typical. Ever since the huge success of *The Blair Witch Project* back in 1999, handheld cameras and found footage have been overused and abused tropes of the horror genre. Not so in *The Borderlands*, where their use feels fully justified to sustain the investigation. As dictated by genre protocol, the area where the supposed paranormal activity/miracle' has taken place, as well as the nearby cottage where the investigators reside, must be staked out by *Big Brother*-style surveillance cameras, and every member of the investigating team has to wear a headcam at all times, as did the SWAT team in 2009's *[REC]2*.

The film cuts together footage from all these cameras to outstanding effect – the angled CCTV shots of empty spaces where nothing happens, but just might, are as effective as the actual scary jolts. The surveillance cameras allow for a steady gaze on the action, an eerily impersonal and grainy perspective, but Goldner also makes strong use of the headcams; less shaky than handheld, they permit eye-matching of dialogue as well as multiple points of view, the latter really coming into their own in a positively oppressive final ten minutes.

But where Goldner really nails it is in creating a group of fully realised characters whose relationships and different takes on religion, faith, ritual and history are as engaging if not more so than the actual storyline – especially



Duty and the priest: *The Borderlands*

the rapport struck up between Deacon and Gray, vividly conveyed by a sharp, witty script and the actors' pared-down performances. The characters' respective provenances (Scotland, Ireland, England) also allow Goldner to delve into the more atavistic elements of British colonial history and identity – tangentially echoing Ben Wheatley's masterful *A Field in England* (2013) – which in turn is linked to the also all-destructive power of the Catholic Church vis-à-vis pagan worship.

Although dismissed in the film as superstition, Gray's observation that paganism is somehow more real because it worships nature and material reality seems to capture the essence of what *The Borderlands* is about. The title refers not only to geography real and imagined, but arguably to the line between real and spiritual worlds, and infers the many atrocities throughout history committed in the name of religion. For what's questioned here is the nature of worship itself, and the hell of repression, guilt, fear and domination occasionally unleashed by it. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Jen Handorf
Written by
Elliot Goldner
Director of Photography
Eben Bolter
Edited by

Mark Towns
Will Gilbey
Jacob Proctor
Production Designer
Holly Cameron
Sound Mixers
Pete Cowasji
Dave Sohanpal

Tom Harburt
Costume Designer
Jon Revell
©Devil Lies
Beneath Ltd
Executive Producer
Jezz Vernon

CAST
Gordon Kennedy
Deacon
Aidan McArdle
Mark
Rob Hill
Gray
Luke Neal

Father Crellick
Patrick Godfrey
Father Calvino
Marcus Cunningham
Mr Proudley
Sarah Annis
Mrs Proudley

In Colour
[1.78:1]
Distributor
Metrodome Distribution Ltd
7993 ft +8 frames

Brazil, the recent past. Police break into a church and remove objects from the altar and cameras and microphones hidden behind its walls.

UK, the present. Brother Deacon, Father Mark and technology specialist Gray are assigned by a Vatican organisation called the Congregation to investigate Father Crellick's claim that a miracle has taken place in his small parish in the West Country: during a baptism one of the guests recorded the crucifix and other objects vibrating on the altar. The investigators fit CCTV cameras in the church and each wears a headcam. Strange things start happening but Deacon and Father Mark remain sceptical. Father Crellick commits suicide and Father Mark closes the case. That night, Deacon ventures into the church alone and has paranormal

experiences. Father Calvino flies in from the Vatican. It transpires that in Brazil Deacon was involved in the death of seven priests who had allegedly seen God.

Father Calvino decides to perform an exorcism, during which Father Mark appears to die but then disappears. Father Calvino disappears too. Deacon and Gray look for them in the catacombs, catching glimpses of both. They discover small cages and texts on the walls, which reveal that the previous priest used the church as an orphanage, lost his mind and started sacrificing the children. Following the voices of Father Mark and Calvino, Deacon and Gray penetrate deeper into the narrowing catacombs, until they become trapped. Their cameras show them submerged in blood and clay coming through the walls.

The Double

United Kingdom/USA 2013
Director: Richard Ayoade
Certificate 15 92m 44s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

See Feature on page 38

Ever since filmmakers learnt the trick of double exposure, the theme of the doppelganger has furnished a favourite cinematic trope – from *The Student of Prague* (1913, 1926 et al) through *The Scapegoat* (1959), *Kagemusha* (1980), *The Double Life of Véronique* (1991), *Adaptation* (2002) and beyond. Spiralling off from it comes the good-twin/bad-twin device (*The Dark Mirror*, 1946; *Cat Ballou*, 1965), the imaginary alter ego (*Fight Club*, 1999) and yet wilder variations. Surprisingly, though, and despite the Russian author's works racking up more than 200 screen adaptations on IMDB, no one seems to have used Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Double* as direct source material. Until now.

The Double (*Dvoinik*) was Dostoevsky's second novel, published in 1846. (It runs to about 150 pages, so might qualify as a novella.) It's not one of his more successful works, a rather too laboured shot at Gogolesque black comedy in the vein of *The Nose* or *The Overcoat*; but then humour was never really Dostoevsky's strong suit. His hero, Golyadkin, is an inept minor functionary in the imperial Russian hierarchy, a man of small account, until another Golyadkin of identical appearance shows up at his office, ingratiates himself with the bosses and starts usurping his namesake's life. Having desperately tried to destroy his double, the wretched man ends up being driven off to an asylum. The novel is often taken as a metaphor for split personality.

Richard Ayoade and his co-screenwriter Avi Korine (brother of Harmony) have taken the bare bones of Dostoevsky's story and relocated them to a clanking retro-dystopian world where Terry Gilliam high-fives Franz Kafka. There are touches of Orwell too: all over the put-upon Simon's workplace hang beaming portraits of the boss, the white-uniformed Colonel (James Fox), adorned with such slogans as "The office can be a jungle. Let the Colonel help!" David Crank's production design (like that of *Brazil*) looks as if austerity Britain had persisted into the 21st century. Cumbersome machines linked up to huge ducts rattle and judder deafeningly (aided and abetted by Andrew Hewitt's ear-jangling score), and the predominant colours are sludge-green and grime-grey. In the café where Simon is routinely scorned by a contemptuous waitress, music leaks from an ancient jukebox; the office party from which he is ejected by a security guard – who, despite Simon's seven years at the firm, still refuses to recognise him – is a tour de force of superannuated crud, with an aged singer in a shiny jacket and bad toupee fronting a torpid band and rendering slushy ballads.

Highly cine-literate, Ayoade wears his influences on his sleeve: not just Gilliam but also the Coen brothers (*The Hudsucker Proxy*), Godard (*Alphaville*), Welles (*The Trial*), Aki Kaurismäki and Michel Gondry get stirred into the mix, and one plot point is lifted straight out of *The Apartment*. But just as his 2010 teen-angst debut feature *Submarine* channelled elements of Wes Anderson without getting swamped by them, in *The Double* Ayoade digests his influences and fashions them into a distinctively bleak mode of



Rhyme and punishment: Jesse Eisenberg, Mia Wasikowska

sardonic black comedy. Right from its opening, when Simon is browbeaten by a stranger into giving up his seat on an otherwise totally empty tube train and then prevented from exiting by a man loading cardboard boxes in his path, the film insidiously traces the build-up of slights and petty humiliations that culminate in the arrival of his double, who's the man Simon would like to be and has perhaps unconsciously conjured up as a vicarious revenge-figure.

Like Jeremy Irons in David Cronenberg's *Dead Ringers* (another possible trace of source material), Jesse Eisenberg skilfully differentiates his twin roles through nuances of expression and posture, never leaving us in any doubt whether it's Simon or his doppelganger James we're looking at. His double performance carries

the film but he gets effective back-up, especially from Wallace Shawn as the furrow-browed boss from hell and Noah Taylor as Simon's laconic colleague, too laidback to offer more than perfunctory sympathy. Sally Hawkins plays against her chirpy norm as a glum receptionist, and Paddy Considine has fun impersonating an improbable TV superhero. Only Mia Wasikowska struggles to flesh out an underwritten role as Hannah, Simon/James's love-interest.

Throughout, Ayoade's film dangles the possibility – as did Dostoevsky's novel – that everything is happening in Simon's tormented imagination, an option that becomes all but explicit in the final scene. But this comes less as a resolving of ambiguities than as a final enigmatic wink at the audience. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Robin C. Fox

Amina Dasmal

Written by

Richard Ayoade

Avi Korine

Story

Avi Korine

Based on *The Double* by Fyodor Dostoevsky

Director of Photography

Erik Alexander Wilson

Editors

Nick Fenton

Chris Dickens

Production Designer

David Crank

Original Score

Andrew Hewitt

Re-recording Mixer

Nigel Heath

Costume Designer

Jacqueline Durran

Production Companies

©Channel

Four Television

Corporation, The

British Film Institute,

Alcove Double Limited

Film4 and BFI present

in association with

Protagonist Pictures

co-produced by

Attercop Productions

and MC Pictures

an Alcove

Entertainment

production

Produced in

association

with Auburn

Entertainment LLP

Made with the

Support of BFI's Film

Fund and Film4

Executive Producers

Michael Caine

Graeme Cox

Tessa Ross

Nigel Williams

CAST

Jesse Eisenberg

Simon James/

James Simon

Mia Wasikowska

Hannah

Wallace Shawn

Mr Papadopoulos

Noah Taylor

Harris

Yasmin Paige

Melanie

Papadopoulos

Cathy Moriarty

Kiki

Phyllis Somerville

Simon's mother

James Fox

the Colonel

Kobna Holdbrook-

Smith

guard/doctor

Tony Rohr

Rudolph

Susan Blommaert

Liz

Sally Hawkins

receptionist at ball

[uncredited]

Paddy Considine

'The Replicator'

Dolby Digital

In Colour

Distributor

Studiocanal Limited

8,346ft +0 frames

An indeterminate time and place. Simon James works for an unnamed company as a data processor, tyrannised by his boss Mr Papadopoulos and treated as a nonentity by everyone he encounters. When security staff fail to recognise him, he's ignominiously ejected from the office party. His sole consolation is dreaming about his colleague Hannah, who works in the photocopier department and lives in an apartment across from his. Simon often spies on her through a telescope. One day a new employee arrives, introduced by Mr Papadopoulos as a young man of great promise: James Simon. James is identical to Simon, even to his clothes, but no one except Simon seems to register the likeness.

James is debonair, self-confident, popular with everyone and successful with women. At first he

befriends Simon, supporting him and offering helpful advice. But before long he starts to encroach on Simon's life, stealing his work to present as his own, bedding Hannah and blackmailing Simon into letting him use his apartment for other assignations. His rising status at work impresses both Mr Papadopoulos and the head of the company, the Colonel. Simon's attempts to denounce him as an impostor are met with scorn and alienate Hannah. When Simon's mother dies, James shows up at the funeral as if he were her son. Infuriated, Simon attacks him and is hit with a shovel by the priest. In despair, Simon attempts suicide, jumping from the roof of his apartment building, but the fall isn't immediately fatal. He's taken off in an ambulance accompanied by Hannah and the Colonel.

8 Minutes Idle

United Kingdom 2012

Director: Mark Simon Hewis

Certificate 15 86m 4s

Reviewed by Gabriel Tate

Developed through Bristol filmmaking initiative iFeatures. Shot locally on a small budget. Torpedoed by the collapse of its distributor, Revolver Entertainment. Resurrected via crowdfunding platform Kickstarter and released on Valentine's Day. The story behind *8 Minutes Idle* is a heartwarming underdog tale of perspiration and inspiration, offering the sort of happy ending that seems increasingly rare in British indie cinema. So it's a shame that, for all its good intentions and occasionally clever ideas, the film itself doesn't quite deliver.

Adapted by Nicholas Blincoe and Matt Thorne from the latter's well-received second novel, *8 Minutes Idle* is the story of bored young call-centre drone Dan (Tom Hughes), ejected from the family home, sleeping in the office with his cat and forced to face up to the demands of the adult world.

Dan's life is littered with promising supporting characters, sympathetically played, but most of them – including his dissolute, charmless parents – are abruptly introduced and listlessly deployed, their motivations often left hazy. Only Ophelia Lovibond, charmingly guileless as Teri, Dan's colleague and the unspoken object of his desire, and Montserrat Lombard, deceptively subtle as his predatory boss Alice, make a real impression. Dead-eyed Dan himself, meanwhile, is something of a cipher: largely unknowable, passive and unsympathetic.

In its more successful sequences, *8 Minutes Idle* feels like an honest and well-meant depiction of the ennui and alienation felt by many young people looking for meaningful work in a struggling economy. (Thorne himself worked in a call centre, and the film's title refers to the maximum time allowed before a call must be made or else disciplinary action faced.) The contours and contrasts of the Bristolian landscape are effectively exploited, and Mike Smith, latterly of Damon Albarn and Jamie Hewlett's Gorillaz, has created a pleasingly lo-fi soundtrack. Unfortunately, the ease with which the latter glides from morose to daft to uplifting is in stark contrast to much of the rest of the film.

Inconsistency of tone, partly caused by episodic, scattershot plotting, is a problem throughout, and the humour is jarringly diffuse. With a little more confidence, the various elements – farce, slapstick, larky character



Office box: Ophelia Lovibond, Tom Hughes

 comedy and surrealism – could have been marshalled into something genuinely memorable and ambitious. An opening credits sequence, for example, promises a technical ingenuity unmatched elsewhere, blending hand-drawn sketches and film. Instead, *8 Minutes Idle* toils in the shadows of bolder, better ventures such as *The Office* and *Office Space*. (The themes of homelessness, underachievement and stasis, along with a scene-stealing ginger tabby, even bring to mind *Inside Llewyn Davis*.) Ultimately lapsing into incoherence, it contrives an absurd series of events leading to a predictable conclusion. But while Dan eventually reverses his apparently unstoppable drift into torpidity, *8 Minutes Idle* cannot. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Sarah Cox
Screenplay

Nicholas Blincoe
Matt Thorne
Based on the novel
by Matt Thorne

Director of
Photography

Sarah Bartles-Smith
Editor

Victoria Stevens
Production
Designers

Chris Richmond
Kiera Tudway

Composer

Mike Smith

Location

Sound Mixer

Alistair Crocker

Costume Designer

Charlotte Mitchell

©iFeatures Limited,
British Film
Institute & BBC
Production
Companies

South West Screen,

UKFC and BBC

Films present in
association with

Matador Pictures,
Cinema Six,
Regent Capital and
City of Bristol an

ArthurCox/Features
presentation

Developed with
the assistance
of BBC Films

Made with the
support of Bristol
City Council,
National Lottery
through the UK Film
Council's Film Fund

An ArthurCox/
iFeatures production

Executive
Producers

Christopher Moll
Steve Jenkins
Charlotte Walls

CAST

Tom Hughes

Dan Thomas

Ophelia Lovibond

Teri Walker

Montserrat

Lombard

Alice

Antonia Thomas

Adrienne
Jack Ashton

Ian

Davian Ladwa

Dev King

Pippa Haywood

Kathy Thomas

Paul Kaye

Steve Thomas

Leigh Quinn

Carrie Oke

Robert Wilfort

Bryan

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Distributor

iFeatures

7,746 ft +0 frames

Endless Love

USA/Japan 2013

Director: Shana Feste

Certificate 12A 104m 33s

Reviewed by Anna Smith

Young love looms large in this loose adaptation of Scott Spencer's novel – the second film version, following the 1981 Brooke Shields vehicle. This time the central pair are slightly older and safer: burly mechanic David (Alex Pettyfer) is an unusually respectful young man, happy to wait until poor little rich girl Jade (Gabriella Wilde) is ready to make love. He doesn't have to wait long: this is an accurate portrait of the heady physical attraction that teenagers might mistake for 'endless love', although aside from a postscript implying that Jade's first love was not her last, it is told without cynicism.

Longing looks, stolen kisses, grand gestures and romantic speeches dominate under the direction of Shana Feste (*Country Strong*). *Endless Love* moves at a leisurely pace, drinking in the visual charms of its leads and the Georgia settings, with the archetypal disapproving father crashing in at regular intervals to provide an obstacle to their love. More complex issues are raised – such as Jade's dead brother and his impact on the family – but they're dispensed with quickly in favour of yet more sun-dappled montages.

A superficial heartstring-tugger, this makes no effort to push the boundaries of a well-worn formula. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Scott Stuber
Pamela Abdy

Josh Schwartz

Stephanie Savage

Screenplay

Shana Feste

Joshua Safran

Based on the book

by Scott Spencer

Director of

Photography

Andrew Dunn

Editor

Maryann Brandon

Production

Designer

Clay Griffith

Music

Christophe Beck

Production

Sound Mixer

Mary Ellis

Costume Designer

Stacey Battat

©Universal Studios

Production

Companies

Universal Pictures

presents a Bluegrass

Films/Fake Empire

production

Presented in

association with

Dentsu Inc./

Fuji Television

Network, Inc.

Executive

Producers

J. Miles Dale

Tracy Falco

CAST

Alex Pettyfer

David Elliot

Gabriella Wilde

Jade Butterfield

Bruce Greenwood

Hugh Butterfield

Joely Richardson

Anne Butterfield

Robert Patrick

Harry Elliot

Rhys Wakefield

Keith Butterfield

Dayo Okeniyi

Mace

Emma Rigby

Jenny

Anna Enger

Sabine

Fabianne Therese

Checka

Dolby Digital/

Datasat

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Universal Pictures

International

US, the present. Pre-med student Jade starts dating mechanic David. When Jade cancels her summer internship to be with David, her father Hugh takes the family to their lake house. Jade invites David to join them. When David and Jade break into the zoo at night with friends, David is arrested, allowing the others to escape. Hugh bails him out on condition that he never see Jade again, and provokes David into hitting him. Jade is sent abroad. On her return, David comes to their house and rescues Hugh from a fire. Hugh and David make amends. Jade and David are reunited.

The Fold

United Kingdom 2013

Director: John Jencks

Certificate 15 89m 18s

Reviewed by Mar Diestro-Dópido

Themes of faith, family and community loom large in John Jencks's debut feature *The Fold*, which is given an intriguingly topical spin by the presence of a Bulgarian immigrant as a principal character. When grieving Anglican priest Rebecca (Catherine McCormack) takes over a small parish in Cornwall, she soon discovers a surrogate for her dead elder daughter in suicidal Bulgarian teenager Radka (Marina Stoimenova). In the course of teaching Radka English so that she can apply for a university art degree, Rebecca's seemingly benevolent attitude begins to curdle into a dangerous obsession.

A British kitchen-sink melodrama if ever there was one, *The Fold*'s dark tale of the often strange forms assumed by lingering grief leaves many a narrative knot untied, the most obvious being the cause of Rebecca's daughter's death; a series of eerily beautiful flashbacks of her lying dead at the bottom of a pool is all we're shown. This ambiguity is mirrored in the damp grey of the Cornish landscape, at once menacing and ravishing, and elegantly captured by cinematographer Luke Palmer.

But for all its picturesque Englishness, the austere, wintry aesthetics of *The Fold* feel redolent of more northerly climes, and particularly the current spate of Scandinavian TV series, even down to a thriller-mystery element of sorts when Rebecca's pain leads her to darker corners of her soul. Like the lines from Rainer Maria Rilke that open the film (and give it its title), Rebecca needs to 'unfold' her grief in order to free her soul from it. But this makes her blind to her younger daughter Eloise's needs as well as to Radka's, essentially pushing everyone to the edge in her drive to redeem herself. In fact, *The Fold*'s more disturbing aspects lie



Taken in: Marina Stoimenova

G.B.F.

USA 2013
Director: Darren Stein
Certificate: not submitted 93m

barely concealed behind the good intentions of both Rebecca and this small community as they offer to help Radka and others similarly stranded, hinting at a condescending, compromised relationship with the foreign workers who live clustered in a van camp outside the town. As such, *The Fold* nods to those numerous horror films that figure an East European as an unassimilable other, parasitic here on the host's education, money and generosity, nowhere more so than in the figure of Bulgarian-born Radka. At first she is presented as an adolescent who's come to the UK to better herself and who needs help with her English and her life, but her damsel-in-distress image soon degenerates into something more menacing. Her never-explained (nor resolved) jealousy and proprietorial nature translate into violent episodes that more often than not involve a knife, her behaviour seemingly as random and unpredictable as the Cornish weather and as sinister as the local cliffs. **◎**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Jay Taylor
Alexa Seligman
Writer
Poppy Cogan
Director of Photography
Luke Palmer
Editor
David Wigram
Production Designer
Iain Andrews
Music
Donna McKeitt
Sound Recordist
Adam Toy
Costume Designer
Charlotte Mitchell
©The Electric

Shadow Company
Production Companies
Electric Shadow, Waterfront Films
Executive Producers
Margaret Matheson
Joe Simpson

CAST

Catherine McCormack
Rebecca Ashton
Marina Stojmenova
Radka Dimitrova
Dakota Blue Richards
Eloise Ashton
Oliver Dimsdale
Daniel Eaves

Jakub Gierszal
Lukas
Owen Teale
Edward Ashton
In Colour
[1.78:1]
Distributor
Miracle Communications/
Electric Shadow

8,037 ft +0 frames

UK, the recent past. The daughter of Anglican priest Rebecca Ashton is found dead at the bottom of a swimming pool. Eleven months later Rebecca moves with her younger teenage daughter Eloise to Cornwall, and takes over a local parish. One day she finds a young Bulgarian woman, Radka, sleeping in the church. Rebecca glimpses Radka's scarred wrists. It transpires that Radka was studying English in order to apply for an art degree, but the English teacher was dismissed. Radka works the land with a group of East European immigrants who live in a camp of vans outside the town. Rebecca offers to teach Radka English to prepare her for her exam. Gradually, a mutual obsession takes hold, with Rebecca treating Radka as a surrogate daughter. Meanwhile, Eloise, who plays the violin, gets to know Radka's colleagues, with whom she plays music. She becomes emotionally involved with one of them. After Radka gets into a fight with her boyfriend, Rebecca spends the night with her in the church, where they share the same bed. They are woken by a local woman the next morning, and as a consequence Rebecca is dismissed from teaching Radka. Rebecca waits for Radka in her van and tells her that she'll be her guardian. That night Radka turns up at Rebecca's house and discovers she has another daughter, Eloise, whom she attacks in a fit of jealousy before Rebecca intervenes. Radka runs into the sea; Rebecca saves her from drowning. The next day Rebecca takes Radka's English books to her in hospital and says she'll never see her again. Radka takes her exam. Rebecca is joined by her husband at the camp, where they watch Eloise playing the violin.

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Reversing the trope of the shunned and mocked gay teenager, *G.B.F.* has the popularity of its young protagonist skyrocket when he comes out. The female classmates of mousy, nice-natured Tanner (Michael J. Willett) have gleaned from reality TV the necessity of the titular Gay Best Friend, but an absence of out gay boys at their school makes it hard for even the most spoiled princess to acquire one. When Tanner accidentally outs himself to the whole school via a mishap with the online dating app 'Guydar', his friendship instantly becomes a desirable status symbol, particularly for the school's three reigning queen bees, 'Shley (Andrea Bowen), Caprice (Xosha Roquemore) and Fawcett (Sasha Pieterse).

G.B.F. gestures towards subversion by making arch references to high-school movies new and old – mean girl Caprice stages a musical version of *Mean Girls*, the climactic prom is disrupted via a silly, camp homage to *Carrie* – and drawing attention to its own deployment of genre clichés such as the makeover montage and the gooey what-I've-learned speech. But ultimately it seeks happy assimilation rather than disruption, in terms of both teen-movie culture and sexual politics; pointing out its conventional plot elements doesn't change the fact that it has them, and even the aforementioned speech takes the theme of how much Tanner would prefer his sexuality to go unmentioned.

The consequence is a mixed bag of tones: certain lines sting nicely (a Mormon character is told, "Your religion's just Scientology without birth control or celebrities"); others ring incongruously crude (a gay best friend is described as "some fat bitch whore's sexless accessory"); and elsewhere, as when Tanner comes out to his parents, emotional epiphanies slip by as slickly and simply as Christmas adverts for beloved department stores. The



Michael J. Willett, Sasha Pieterse

target audience becomes hard to imagine. Is this meant for actual kids, as its more naive or obvious elements would suggest ("You're not trying to screw me like a guy, or threatened by me like every other girl in school," says Fawcett to Tanner, who helpfully rejoins, "I guess that's the appeal of this whole G.B.F. thing")? Or for nostalgic grown-ups for whom it's more a satire on the genre than an addition to it? It's not impossible for a film to address both constituencies, of course, but the effect here is one of lopsidedness. And certain elements just confound altogether: the laboured *Carrie* pastiche, in which glitter stands in for pigs' blood, abandons any sense that we're in a real world at all and makes limited sense even outside of one.

Ultimately *G.B.F.* feels harmless without exactly being tender, and proficient without quite passing for mainstream. Its crossover potential, in any case, has been severely limited by a restrictive R rating from the MPAA, based on far lighter sexual content and language than has been passed as PG-13 in comedies about heterosexual teenagers. **◎**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Darren Stein
George Northy
Richard Bever
Stephen Israel
Written by
George Northy
Director of Photography
Jonathan Hall
Edited by
Philip J. Bartell
Production Design
Michael Fitzgerald
Music
Brian H. Kim
Sound Mixer
Rudy Zasloff
Costume Design
Kit Scarbo

©GBF, LLC
Production Companies
School Pictures and Parting Shots Media in association with ShadowCatcher Entertainment and Steakhaus Productions Developed with the assistance of the Outfest Screenwriting Lab

Executive Producers

Theodore S. Gildred III
Patrick Loftus-Hills
Charlie Goulder
Michelle Polino
Matthew Spain
William Q. Derrough
Jennifer Levine
David Skinner
Tom Gorai

CAST

Michael J. Willett
Tanner Daniels
Paul Iacono
Brent Van Camp
Sasha Pieterse
Fawcett Brooks
Andrea Bowen
'Shley Osgoodie
Xosha Roquemore
Caprice Winters
Molly Tarlov
Sophie Aster
Evanna Lynch
McKenzie Pryce
Joanna Jo'le
Levesque
Soledad Brainstein
Derek Mio
Glenn Cho
Mia Rose Frampton
Mindie
Taylor Frey

US, the present. Tanner and his best friend Brent are gay but not yet out. Both attend a school with no openly gay students, though the most popular girls, 'Shley, Caprice and Fawcett, all yearn for a gay best friend, and wannabe activist Soledad needs a gay student for her Gay-Straight Alliance. At Brent's urging, Tanner signs up to the dating app Guydar, and is promptly outed to the whole school when Soledad finds him on it. Furious with Brent, Tanner outs him to his mother. Caprice, 'Shley and Fawcett give Tanner a makeover and compete for his friendship. Drunk after a party, Tanner finds Brent outside his house; the two kiss and later wake up in bed together. Tanner becomes favourite to be crowned king of the upcoming prom. Learning that the school will not allow Tanner to take a male date to the prom, Tanner and Fawcett set up an alternative, gay-friendly event. Brent offers to take Tanner and is hurt when Tanner turns him down. Caprice is also angry with Tanner for favouring Fawcett; she and Brent join forces to promote the 'traditional' prom, with the backing of Mormons 'Shley and McKenzie. When their campaign becomes overtly homophobic, the principal cancels the official prom. Brent and Caprice forge a plan to disrupt the alternative prom by dropping glitter on the king and queen. Tanner comes out to his parents, who tell him that they knew he was gay.

At the prom, Tanner and Fawcett are crowned king and queen. Shoving them out of the way, Brent is covered in glitter and finally comes out publicly.

Half of a Yellow Sun

Nigeria/United Kingdom 2012

Director: Biyi Bandele

Certificate 15 111m 26s

Reviewed by David Jays

At the end of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, some titles describe the protagonists' subsequent lives as if they were real figures in a biopic. It's an uneasy choice. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's source novel powerfully follows a tumultuous decade in Nigerian history, but this film adaptation has neither the resources for an epic nor the needling imagination to let its fictional characters breathe.

Adichie's novel, which won the 2007 Orange Prize, takes its title from the flag of Biafra, the breakaway Nigerian state that survived for only three years until starvation brought it to its knees in 1970. Most of its central characters are Igbo, notably the self-possessed twins Olanna and Kainene. A sociologist and an entrepreneur respectively, they boast impressive educations (Oxford, Yale) and professional success, emblematic of affluent post-colonial Nigeria.

The film is a feature debut for the Nigerian-born, British-based writer Biyi Bandele (he directed a short, *The Kiss*, in 2009). An accomplished stage dramatist, he has confidently parlayed personal stories through an epic sweep – including a 1997 stage version of *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe's defining Nigerian novel. But budgets on this film were clearly tight, and a flurry of short scenes suggests a ruthlessly pruned screenplay, shuttling through Olanna's bumpy relationship with radical academic Odenigbo and then the rise and fall of Biafra. The first half rattles from one soapy confrontation to the next, as Olanna is scorned by Odenigbo's indomitable mother ("I hear you did not suck your mother's breasts") and betrayed by her lover before seducing her sister's boyfriend while 'Santa Baby' purrs in the background.

Without a novel's leisure to burrow



Thandie Newton

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Andrea Calderwood

Screenplay

Biyi Bandele

Based on the novel by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Director of Photography

John de Borman

Editor

Chris Gill

Production Designer

Andrew McAlpine

Music

Ben Onono

Paul Thomson

Production Sound Mixer

Giancarlo Dellapina

Costume Designer

Jo Katsaras

©Shareman Media Limited / The British Film Institute / Yellow Sun Limited

Production Companies

Shareman Media and BFI present in association with Metro International

Entertainment and Kachifo Limited

in association with Lip Sync Productions LLP

A Slate Films

production of a film by Biyi Bandele

Developed with the assistance of the British Broadcasting Corporation

Developed by Shareman Media, the UK Film Council and Kachifo Limited

With the support of the MEDIA Programme of the European Union

Made with the support of the BFI's Film Fund

Executive Producers

Yewande Sadiku

Muhtar Bakare

Gail Egan

Norman Merry

Peter Hampden

CAST

Thandie Newton

Olanna

Chiwetel Ejiofor

Odenigbo

Anika Noni Rose

Kainene

Joseph Mawle

Richard

John Boyega

Ugwu

Genevieve Nnaji

Miss Adebayo

onyeka Onwenu

Odenigbo's mama

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Soda Pictures

10,029 ft +0 frames

into experience and wrap incident in reflection, these fraught scenes hurry by at an almost absurd lick. Adaptations must inevitably make stark choices and forgo breadth, and whereas Adichie offers Olanna's perspective alongside that of the houseboy Ugwu and Kainene's British boyfriend Richard, here Olanna's experience dominates. Despite a watchful performance from John Boyega, Ugwu's startling journey – from uneducated country boy to accomplished chef, teacher, military conscript and eventually, we're told, published writer – barely registers.

Adichie's novel picks up on linguistic differences as characters slide between English and Igbo (distinctions that prove fatal as conflict sharpens). Most of the principal actors are British, but Thandie Newton's subtle vocal performance as Olanna steps from chilly Oxford tones to a less formal Nigerian accent. (Her hair, too, is in constant flux – braided in one scene, bobbed the next.) She and Chiwetel Ejiofor as Odenigbo bring nuance and warmth to the scrappy melodrama of their relationship, but a stilted Anika Noni Rose can't illuminate Kainene's journey from executive to profiteer.

More involving is Nigerian fragmentation, as affluent professionals tumble into desperate indignity and tribal allegiance trumps shared national solidarity. Bandele tellingly uses crowd scenes to accent the shift from independence celebrations to terrified evacuation and violence. Even so, nothing the film dramatises has as much force as the archive footage that shrewdly provides context as the country falls into chaos: images of Biafra's bombastic president General Ojukwu; a boys' brigade training with wooden rifles; a young Frederick Forsyth reporting for the BBC. The rare cinematic focus on a traumatic decade in African history is bracing but it rarely comes to life. **S**

Highway

Director: Imtiaz Ali

Certificate 12A 132m 56s



One charmed bandit: Alia Bhatt

Reviewed by Naman Ramachandran

Imtiaz Ali has made a career out of fashioning love stories and setting them in different milieux, from his debut *Socha Na Tha* (2005) to *Jab We Met* (2007), *Love Aaj Kal* (2009) and *RockStar* (2011). In all his films, the lead characters take life-changing journeys, and *Highway* is no different, being essentially one long road trip. Unlike Ali's earlier films, however, *Highway* isn't a romance but is instead about two damaged people who offer each other solace after circumstances bring them together. The film is based on an episode of the television programme *Rishtey*, which Ali co-wrote and directed in 1999, and he stays close to his source material, down to repeating lines of dialogue and the framing of some shots. The story benefits from the transition to the big screen, shot spectacularly across the countryside of six northern Indian states in gorgeous locations.

But beneath the natural beauty lurks a harrowing tale. Unusually for a mainstream Bollywood film, Ali places the issue of child sexual abuse front and centre. *Highway*'s child-woman leading lady Veera, a billionaire's daughter and a bride-to-be, is shaken out of her cloistered existence in a palatial home when she is kidnapped by the ruffian Mahabir and his men. After initially experiencing the blind terror associated with being abducted by a gang of toughs, all of whom are potential sexual predators, Veera soon realises that their leader Mahabir is human beneath his crusty exterior, and she discloses to him that she was sexually abused as a child.

As Veera and Mahabir's relationship goes beyond the Stockholm syndrome stage and approaches friendship, Ali takes the sex out of the equation. Veera, hitherto dressed in figure-hugging western clothes, is given billowy Indian garb to wear. When she and Mahabir eventually sleep together, it is a chaste affair, like children hugging teddy bears, with no sex in the picture.

Veera is a difficult role to pull off but Alia Bhatt, in only her third role following *Sangharsh* (1999) and *Student of the Year* (2012), manages to convey the character's complex fragility perfectly. Her bravura moment is when she confronts her abuser in a scene that nods to *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), another film dealing with child sexual abuse in Delhi high society. Randeep Hooda as Mahabir proves a fine foil, with one outstanding



emotionally naked moment when he realises that a future with Veera is impossible.

With *Highway*, Ali takes a giant stride forward as a filmmaker, proving that there is indeed a way of highlighting issues within the parameters of a mainstream, commercial Bollywood film, in contrast to the assembly line of instantly forgettable blockbusters the industry churns out with monotonous regularity. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Sajid Nadiadwala
Imtiaz Ali
Screenplay
Imtiaz Ali
Cinematography
Anil Mehta
Editing
Aarti Bajaj
Production Design
Acropolis
Music
A. R. Rahman
Sound Design
Resul Pookutty
Costume Design

Aki Narula
Production Companies
Produced by Window Seat Films
A Sajid Nadiadwala presentation
CAST
Alia Bhatt
Veera Tripathi
Randeep Hooda
Mahabir Bhati
In Colour

Subtitles
Distributor
UTV Motion Pictures
11,964 ft +0 frames

New Delhi, the present. On the eve of her wedding, billionaire's daughter Veera persuades her fiancé to take her for a drive on the highway, despite his reservations about venturing out without security. When they stop for fuel, they are involved in a robbery and Veera is taken hostage by petty criminal Mahabir and his henchmen. Mahabir finds out about Veera's rich father and decides to demand a ransom, driving across northern Indian states to elude the police manhunt. Veera's father uses his political influence to get a dedicated police team to rescue his daughter, but keeps the news out of the media. Mahabir spots Veera trying to escape but lets her go, knowing that she will have to come back since they are miles from any help. She returns and gradually, after Mahabir saves her from being sexually molested by one of his men, she overcomes her fear of the gruff gang leader. Given another chance to escape, Veera decides instead to stay with Mahabir, much to his bafflement. She reveals to him that her uncle repeatedly raped her when she was nine. Mahabir reveals that he too had an unhappy childhood, and was very young when he took to a life of crime, killing three people. Veera persuades Mahabir to take her to the mountains, where they enjoy a brief idyll before the police arrive and shoot Mahabir dead.

Back in Delhi, Veera exposes her abusive uncle to the rest of her family. She returns to the mountains and finds peace, making a living running a jam factory.

Honour

United Kingdom/USA 2012
Director: Shan Khan
Certificate 15 104m 8s

Reviewed by Ashley Clark

In choosing to focus on the thorny, tabloid-ready subject of honour killing within the British-Asian community, Shan Khan has made a brave start to his directorial career. Unfortunately, it soon becomes apparent that this overstuffed, convoluted thriller, which genuflects constantly towards the work of Quentin Tarantino (self-consciously chronologically manipulated structure) and Guy Ritchie (florid style, macho violence), is perhaps not the most appropriate context in which to address such material.

Aiysha Hart gives a spirited performance as the bold Mona, a young Muslim woman rebelling against family conventions to run away with her Punjabi boyfriend. Yet she is ultimately – and disappointingly – reduced to damsel in distress, to be rescued by the bounty hunter initially hired by her family to dispense with her. The construct of the knight in shining armour (Paddy Considine in an odd, somnambulant performance) is at best a feeble concession to generic convention, at worst deeply insulting, especially because the script can't seem to decide whether this particular white saviour is still a virulent racist or not. At one moment, he's seen scraping off his Aryan Brotherhood tattoo with a hot knife; the next he's wolfing down a plate of sausage and beans and telling Mona's hardline brother Kasim, without apparent irony, that the days of "Great" Britain are long gone, and that the country was at its peak when "women were women and slaves were slaves". By the time Mona is sexily fingering his remaining 'white power' body ink, it's difficult to know whether to laugh or cry.

Though flawed, *Honour* is not totally without merit. It's competently shot and features a host of grimy, well-chosen London locations, while some scenes, particularly the one in which Mona's brothers attempt to dispense of her 'dead' body, are aptly tense. Khan also deserves credit for broaching the subject of heated racial animus in contemporary Britain, even if his approach is often distractingly heavyhanded, especially because his characters seem like ciphers rather



Lost in a forest: *Honour*

than fully rounded people. Harvey Virdi as Mona's monstrous mother gives an over-the-top performance that's accentuated by all manner of oblique camera angles and shadowy lighting (Khan somehow manages to film the act of her sewing fabric like it's the devil's work). At least younger brother Adel, performed with sensitivity by Shubham Saraf, seems an almost authentic character, struggling with divided family loyalty.

Ultimately, *Honour* would have been a much better film had Khan stuck to one path – either pared-down realism, in which context an assessment of the issues at hand would have carried more dramatic weight, or full-on exploitation, with the shackles of 'social conscience' thrown off. As it is, the florid *Honour* crashes between two stools, coming off oddly risible and leaving a sour taste. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Nisha Parti
Jason Newmark
Written by
Shan Khan
Director of Photography
David Higgs
Editor
Beverley Mills
Production Designer

Andy Harris
Composer
Theo Green
Production Sound Mixer
Barry O'Sullivan
Costume Designer
Yasmine Abraham
Production Designer

Production Companies
CinemaNX, Isle of Man Film and Code Red present a Newscope Films and Parti production
Developed with the support of the BFI Film Fund
Produced in

association with Cacti Films, Dan Films
Executive Producers
Steve Christian
Marc Samuelson
Julia Lebedev
Leonid Lebedev
Adam Nagel

Cast
Aiysha Hart
Mona
Paddy Considine
Bounty
Harvey Virdi
Mother
Faraz Ayub
Kasim
Shubham Saraf
Adel

Nikesh Patel
Tanvir
Dolby Digital/
Datasat
In Colour
Distributor
Pinewood Films
9,372 ft +0 frames

The plot is chronologically reordered in the film, but is presented here sequentially.

London, present day. Mona, a young British Muslim woman, plans to run away with her Punjabi boyfriend Tanvir. Mona's mother instructs her brothers Kasim (a policeman) and Adel to prevent the elopement but Mona escapes as far as Euston station. Adel, under pressure from Kasim, telephones Mona – who has yet to decide on her future – and persuades her to return home. Back at the family home, Kasim, with the help of his mother, strangles Mona, and believes that he has killed her: an 'honour killing' in retaliation for her rebellious actions. Kasim and Adel pack Mona into a trunk and attempt to dispose of the body in a

clearing. Adel, troubled by his conscience and puzzled by indentation marks in the side of the trunk, opens it: Mona is alive, and escapes again. Her mother hires a notorious neo-Nazi bounty hunter to locate her. He soon finds her, but develops a bond with her. The bounty hunter arrives at the family home with what he says is Mona's heart in a plastic bag. The mother is suspicious, and instructs her sons to check the heart with a local butcher. He tells them it's a pig's heart. Kasim finds the bounty hunter's whereabouts from a mutual acquaintance. He chases the bounty hunter and Mona on to a rooftop. Kasim and the bounty hunter shoot each other. The bounty hunter dies; Kasim's fate is uncertain. Mona escapes to a new life in Glasgow.

I Declare War

Canada 2011
Director: Jason Lapeyre
Certificate: not submitted 90m

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

Realistic films about children, ones that manage to pay proper attention to both their innocence and their cruelty, their charm and their egoism, are vanishingly rare. While *I Declare War* does not always find convincing ways to dramatise the complexities, it never loses sight of them, and is at times a surprisingly biting entertainment.

The central conceit is established in the first few moments, as a small boy runs through long grass holding a gun made out of sticks and string with a tin can for a magazine. As he runs, the chug of helicopter blades rises on the soundtrack and the stick rifle is replaced by a real one; this blurring of the borders between playful reality and lethal fantasy continues throughout the film. An afternoon's game of war in the local woods is in some ways disturbingly close to the real thing; perhaps, too, the real thing has an element of childishness.

War is the continuation of politics by other means; and for children, politics is friendship. The motor for the plot is a somewhat mysterious rivalry between the charismatic PK and Skinner, a charmless, angry boy who carries others with him through sheer aggression. Having 'killed' his own general, the handsome, older-looking Quinn, Skinner sets out to humiliate the hitherto undefeated PK; while PK, his head a jumble of maxims from Napoleon and viewings of *Patton*, is tactically more astute, Skinner's ruthlessness and disregard for the rules of war give him an edge. But both leaders have to work with soldiers distracted by their own friendships, by attraction to or contempt for Jess, the only girl, by daydreams and penis-based hypotheticals (suppose you can be the richest, most famous, most popular person in the world BUT you have to stick your dick in a dog's mouth?).

Jason Lapeyre's script plays nicely with the boys' awareness of war films, peppering the dialogue with half-grasped military jargon and



Game boy: Gage Munroe

half-ironic tough-guy posturing ("This is PK, he doesn't lose"; "You talking about his virginity?" "I heard he lost it to your mom"). At their best, the young cast are excellent. When Joker (the *Full Metal Jacket* allusion is presumably deliberate) challenges gentle, churchgoing Wesley to eat a dog turd, with the promise that he will be his best friend *and* pay him \$50, Andy Reid manages beautifully to convey Wesley's mix of dismay and calculation, his fleeting sense that just maybe it would be worth it. Elsewhere, they mostly make up in conviction what they lack in nuance – the goofy Frost's babbling crush on Jess, Skinner's paranoia, PK's iron determination.

For all its virtues, *I Declare War* feels unresolved. It's a relief that the filmmakers don't feel the need to descend into *Lord of the Flies* territory; but the real violence and cruelty Skinner brings into the game remain bizarrely consequence-free, and the final explanation we're given for his determination to bring PK down is frustratingly pat, insufficient to account for the degree of self-loathing on display. S

The Legend of Hercules

USA/Bulgaria 2014
Director: Renny Harlin
Certificate 12A 98m 52s

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

The history of Hercules films is extensive without being distinguished, so it's hard to argue that Renny Harlin's *The Legend of Hercules* disappoints. (That should be Heracles, since it's ostensibly a rendition of Greek rather than Roman mythology, not that it matters.) Swiping some of its colour palette – or perhaps just an excuse for shoddy CGI – from *300* (2006), *The Legend of Hercules* initially threatens to go all out with the coming-at-you approach to 3D, with a long, largely computer-animated tracking shot that starts with debris from a shipwreck floating straight at the lens and culminates with two rival divisions of archers poised to let their arrows fly. But full assault on the audience never commences and the film soon slouches into gently unobjectionable mediocrity.

Hercules is played by *Twilight* vet Kellan Lutz, an appropriately chiselled sort of sub-Taylor Lautner in terms of expressiveness. Shipped off to Egypt by evil king Amphitryon (MMA fighter Scott Adkins) to be slaughtered by mercenaries, Hercules fights his way back to Greece as a gladiator for promoter Lucius (Kenneth Cranham in cod Oliver Reed mode) in a plot whose meagre contours are shamelessly modelled on *Gladiator* (2000). In the deeply confused finale, Hercules is tied up in a crucified position, then turns to the skies and accepts his divine lineage as Zeus's child ("Father, I believe in you"). The Harlin whose craftsmanship got the most lowbrow pleasures possible out of *Deep Blue Sea* (1999) and *Mindhunters* (2004) is in evidence during the plentiful, well-choreographed and coherent combat scenes, if not otherwise. S

Credits and Synopsis

Credits and Synopsis

Co-director

Robert Wilson
Produced by

Patrick Cameron
Robert Wilson
Lewin Webb
Written by

Jason Lapeyre
Director of Photography

Ray Dumas

Editor

Aaron Marshall

Production Designer

Diana Abbatangelo

Music

Nick Dyer

Production Sound Mixer

Bryan Day

Costume Designer

Marie-Eve Tremblay

©IDW Films Inc.

Production Companies

Samaritan Entertainment presents
A Samaritan Entertainment production
Made with the

assistance of the Samaritan Entertainment Production Fund No. 1

With the participation of the Canadian Film or Video Production Tax Credit, Ontario Media Development Corporation

CAST

Siam Yu

Paul Kwon

Gage Munroe

P.K. Sullivan

Michael Friend

Jamie Skinner

Aidan Gouyea

Quinn Wilson

Mackenzie Munro

Jessica Dobrzanski

Alex Cardillo

Roy Frost

Dyson Fyke

Trevor Sikorski

Spencer Howes

Albert Washington,

'Joker'

Andy Reid

Wesley Bishop

Kolton Stewart

Caleb

Richard Nguyen

Kevin
Eric Hanson

Kenney
Alex Wall

Scott

Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor

Kaleidoscope Film Distribution

Not submitted

for theatrical classification

Video certificate: 15

Running time: 90m 0s

North America, present day. On a hot summer's day, two teams of 12-year-olds compete in a game of war in the local woods, with sticks for guns and balloons full of red liquid for grenades. PK, natural leader, student of military history and fan of the 1970 film 'Patton', has never lost a war; but this one takes a nasty turn when his opponent Quinn is overthrown in a coup by the more aggressive and possibly disturbed Skinner. Skinner takes PK's best friend Kwon prisoner, dispatching his troops on patrol duties so that he can torture him. Another boy arrives with a message that Kwon's mother has been rushed to hospital: Skinner surmises – correctly – that this is a ruse, and has his men pelt the messenger with rocks. As the afternoon wears on, PK's relentless will to win and insistence on playing by the rules antagonise his own army. Kwon escapes but reluctantly returns to captivity to aid PK's battle plan. Meanwhile Jess, the only girl in the group, secretly determined to capture the flags of both generals as a love-offering to Quinn, foments rivalry between best friends Frost and Sikorski and removes PK's flag from under the nose of the naive Wesley – only to be 'killed' by PK's silent, enigmatic friend Caleb. In a final showdown, Skinner's rage is partly explained: he was PK's best friend until Kwon arrived in the neighbourhood. Victorious, PK invites Kwon home for dinner; sickened by PK's willingness to sacrifice him for victory, Kwon refuses.

Produced by

Danny Lerner

Les Weldon

Boaz Davidson

Renny Harlin

Written by

Sean Hood

Daniel Giat

Director of Photography

Sam McCurdy

Editor

Vincent Tabbalion

Production Designer

Luca Tranchino

Music

Tuomas Kantelinen

Sound Mixer

Vladimir Kaloyanov

Costume Designer

Sonu Mishra

Visual Effects

Worldwide FX

Digiscope

Factory VFX

Ghost VFX

HydraFX

Identity FX, Inc.

Prime Focus VFX

Reliance

MediaWorks

Johnathon Schaech

Tarak

Gaia Weiss

Hebe

Rade Serbedzija

Chiron

Kenneth Cranham

Lucius

Mariah Gale

Kakia

Luke Newberry

Agamemnon

Roxanne McKee

Queen Alcmena

Dolby Digital/

Datasat

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Lionsgate UK

CAST

Kellan Lutz

Hercules

Scott Adkins

King Amphitryon

Liam McIntyre

Sotiris

Liam Garrigan

Iphicles

8,898 ft +0 frames

Ancient Greece. Alcmene, wife of tyrannous King Amphitryon, is impregnated by Zeus and gives birth to Hercules. Twenty years later, Hercules is sent to Egypt by Amphitryon as part of a doomed military mission. Sold into slavery, Hercules returns to Greece as a gladiator, defeating Amphitryon in combat and assuming his rightful position as king.

The Lego Movie

Directors: Phil Lord, Christopher Miller
Certificate U 100m 26s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Given the paucity of aspiration shown by most toy-brand-inspired films (the shiny explosive emptiness of the *Transformers* series comes to mind), *The Lego Movie* could be half as witty, cleverly kinetic and audacious as it manages to be and still be way ahead of the pack. Directors Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, whose *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* (2009) showed off the same exuberant inventiveness, have thought outside the (Lego) box when putting together this whip-smart, densely detailed epic quest. Plundering every Warner Bros movie ever licensed for a Lego kit (and others besides), they've created a hilariously heterogeneous minifigured *Matrix* spoof in which ordinary worker Emmet is accidentally swept into a revolt against the tyrant Lord Business and has to stop him glueing the Lego universe into rigid submission.

From its jostling pop-culture cohort of questers (Batman rubs shoulders with Abe Lincoln, Wonder Woman and Lego's Benny the Blue Spaceman) to the welter of sumptuously simulated worlds through which the plot barrels at warp speed, it's a postmodern theme-park ride of a film – particularly since its shiny Bricksburg cityscape, candy-coloured Cloud Cuckoo Land and rollicking Wild West are in fact lovingly detailed simulations of simulations. Even the roiling Lego oceans and rippling explosions are formed from the 12 million virtual CG blocks rendered by Animal Logic.

Perceptively, the film's central theme plays on the duality of Lego, the contrast between elaborate kits and freestyling creativity played out in the

The Lego Movie



Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Dan Lin
Roy Lee
Screenplay

Phil Lord
Christopher Miller
Story

Dan Hageman
Kevin Hageman
Phil Lord
Christopher Miller

Based on Lego
construction toys

Cinematography

Pablo Plaisted
Edited by

David Burrows
Chris McKay
Production Designer

Grant Freckleton

Music

Mark Mothersbaugh

Sound Designer

Wayne Pashley

Animation

Chris McKay

Co-director

Chris McKay

©[TBC]

Production

Companies

Warner Bros.

Pictures presents

in association with

Village Roadshow

Pictures, Lego

System A/S a Vertigo Entertainment/Lin Pictures production

Executive Producers

Jill Wilfert

Matthew Ashton

Kathleen Fleming

Allison Abbate

Zareh Nalbandian

Jon Burton

Benjamin Melniker

Michael E. Uslan

Seanne Winslow

Matt Skiena

Bruce Berman

VOICE CAST

Chris Pratt

Emmet

Will Ferrell

President Business/

Lord Business

Elizabeth Banks

Wyldstyle aka Lucy

Will Arnett

Batman

Nick Offerman

Craggy

Alison Brie

Uni-Kitty

Charlie Day

Benny the Blue

Spaceman

Liam Neeson

Good Cop/Bad Cop

Morgan Freeman

Vitruvius

Orville Forte

[i.e. Will Forte]

Jill Wilfert

Matthew Ashton

Abe Lincoln

Cobie Smulders

Wonder Woman

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor

Warner Bros

Distributors (UK)

9,039 ft +0 frames

revolt of the inventive Master Builders against the rule-bound empire of Will Ferrell's grandiloquent Lord Business. Though the narrative hinges on Emmet's eventual ability to harness unfocused ingenuity, the film itself often has the crammed, sugar-rush feel of a toy-box binge, throwing plot detours, visual gags and knowing asides into the mix with glee. Far more sophisticated than most family movies, it features a delicious mix of slapstick and adult-pleasing social satire in Emmet's hometown Bricksburg, a super-regulated surveillance society with a paramilitary police force, where the obedient populace are sated with overpriced coffee and the mind-numbing pop anthem 'Everything Is Awesome'. The quest itself furnishes a similarly well-crafted mix of affectionate movie parodies, balanced with quick-fire action sequences in which landscapes are exhilaratingly repurposed by Emmet's freedom-fighter buddies into speeding chase vehicles. All for sale as Lego kits, naturally. Fox News may have fulminated against *The Lego Movie*'s perceived anti-business bias, but satire and marketing aren't mutually exclusive here.

The film's most ambitious gambit is to drop a live-action meta-narrative into its third act – a family power struggle that resonates thematically but breaks up the dramatic rhythm of the quest, as the film cuts frantically between two showdowns. Combined with the film's sensory overload, exuberant scripting and voice work (besides Ferrell, Liam Neeson and Morgan Freeman also spoof their movie personae enthusiastically), by the end this turns the film's gleeful overabundance into a climax-sapping glut. Despite its envelope-pushing excellence, *The Lego Movie*, unlike its hero, can't recognise the point at which boundless creativity hinders more than it helps. ◎

A Long Way Down

United Kingdom/Germany 2013
Director: Pascal Chaumeil
Certificate 15 96m 5s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Suicide is a hard sell on celluloid. It's very hard indeed in comedy, which is why it's usually tucked away as comic garnish (*Airplane!*, 1980) or used as a running gag (the inept attempts in *Better Off Dead*, 1985). Considered at length as in *Harold and Maude* (1971) or the absurdist fantasy *Wristcutters: A Love Story* (2006), it's a rarity. So *A Long Way Down*, the tale of a suicidal quartet who become reluctant allies when they accidentally converge on a tower-block roof on New Year's Eve, hell-bent on ending it all, would seem something of a risk. Prudently, the film's poster alludes only obliquely to the S-word, while stressing the story's other theme, friendship.

For this is an Odd Bunch movie, one that wrangles disparate characters into a surrogate family, *Full Monty*-style, in order to share their secrets and lighten their sorrows as they make a pact to live until Valentine's Day. Too bad, then, that the film makes such frothily light work of its heavy subject matter that it sacrifices both black comedy and pathos in the process.

Adapted by Jack Thorne from Nick Hornby's bestselling novel, the script ignores the book's riffing eloquence about depression in favour of a fervently feelgood romp through the joint travails of the 'Topper House Four', as the tabloid press christens them when it learns of their miraculous escape. So it's no surprise that the protagonists' predicaments and narrative arcs feel sandpapered and their characters and collective solutions wafer-thin, from the stagey opening rooftop get-together onwards. Where the book's four-voice narrative shows off Hornby's facility for interior monologue, the film uses it inconsistently and clumsily, failing to get under the skin of the characters. Director Pascal Chaumeil, whose slick 2010 'rom-con' *Heartbreaker* hit its blackly comic beats neatly, can't get any bite out of the limp gags ("I bet we're going to live to regret this," quips Pierce Brosnan's Martin, signing the non-suicide pact) or any real feel of camaraderie from his lead actors.

Such sketchy characterisation gives the cast little to play with. Both Brosnan and Aaron Paul, as laconic failed musician JJ, seem to be on autopilot, while Imogen Poots as brittle wild-child Jess pinballs through her scenes as if trying to animate them by sheer force of



Down and flirty: Imogen Poots, Aaron Paul

loquacious wackiness. Only Toni Collette pitches it just right, her downtrodden single mother Maureen caring for a severely disabled adult son with a tenderness that puts the rest of the movie to shame. Even her small gestures speak volumes – an anguished scuttle towards a surgeon who is operating on her son startles you with its sudden dread.

She's the one true note in the film, whose structure and setting otherwise cleave closely to Curtisland, still the dominant setting for English comedies. The film doggedly adopts that proven mixture of humour sprinkled with pathos, self-deprecating dialogue and rueful life lessons leavened with laughing 'bonding' montages (these abound on a clunky Spanish holiday for the four). London looks at its tourist-bait best, with key scenes inexplicably taking place in front of the Houses of Parliament or within sight of the Gherkin. Inevitably, love solves the protagonists' predicaments, ironically proving one of Hornby's drier observations in the novel: "That's the thing with the young these days, isn't it? They watch too many happy endings." ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Finola Dwyer
Amanda Posey

Screenplay

Jack Thorne
Based on the novel
by Nick Hornby

Director of Photography

Ben Davis

Edited by

Barney Pilling
Chris Gill

Production

Designer

Chris Oddy

Music

Dario Marianelli

Sound Recordist

Martin Trevis

Costume Designer

Odile Dicks-Mireux

©A Long Way Down

Limited and British

Broadcasting

Corporation

Production

Companies

DCM Productions

and BBC Films
present a Wildgaze
Films/Finola Dwyer
production in
association with
HanWay Films

A film by Pascal
Chaumeil
Executive
Producers

Christine Langan
Dario Suter
Christoph Daniel
Marc Schmidheiny

Thorsten
Schumacher
Zygi Kamasa
Nick Hornby

CAST

Pierce Brosnan
Martin Sharp
Toni Collette
Maureen
Aaron Paul
JJ
Imogen Poots
Jess
Rosamund Pike

Penny
Tuppence
Middleton
Kathy
Sam Neill
Chris Crichton
Zara White
Shanay
Joe Cole
Chas

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

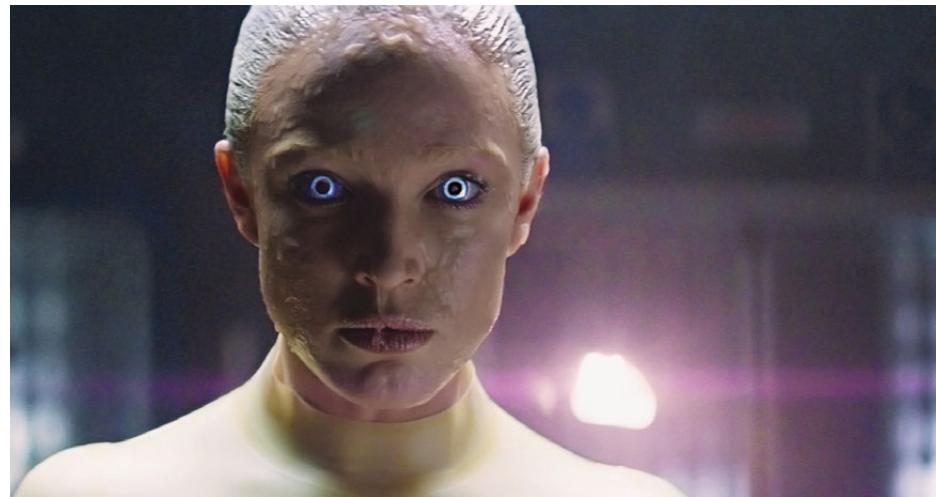
8,647 ft +8 frames

London, New Year's Eve. Disgraced TV host Martin, depressed single mother Maureen, lovelorn Jess and cancer-stricken JJ meet on the roof of a tower block and awkwardly prevent one another jumping off. Jess attempts suicide again that night. Saved by the others, she makes them agree on a pact to stay alive until Valentine's Day. Grudgingly, they become friends and discover each other's stories. Outed to the press, the quartet sell their playfully embellished suicide-attempt story to a newspaper. JJ admits to Jess that he lied about having cancer – he is a depressed, failed musician. When the foursome go on holiday to Spain to escape the press attention, Jess saves JJ from a tabloid sting. JJ tries but fails to drown himself. The group fall out over the discovery that JJ faked his cancer. Back in the UK, Maureen's severely disabled adult son Matty has a heart attack on Valentine's Day. Jess and Martin go to the hospital to support her; Matty survives. The trio find JJ on the tower block again and talk him down.

The following New Year's Eve, the quartet catch up by Skype: Martin is happy with his daughter; Maureen is dating Matty's doctor; Jess and JJ are a couple.

The Machine

United Kingdom 2013
Director: Caradog James



Metal defector: Caity Lotz

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

"Do you know your mother's name? Or what she looked like?" Cybernetics genius Vincent (Toby Stephens) – his name evidently a play on the forename of Dr Frankenstein – is interviewing a soldier whose war-damaged brain has been replaced with a neural implant. In a future where a cold war with China and deep recession are leading to technology-driven military strategies involving bionically enhanced supersoldiers and killing machines, Vincent seems more interested in his subject's capacity for empathy. The questions about the mother in this opening scene, and the soldier's violent response, inevitably evoke Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), with its similar interrogation of the differences between humans and their artificial imitations.

Vincent's Ministry of Defence handler Thomson (Denis Lawson) wants him to build obedient fighting robots, whereas Vincent himself has a hidden agenda – to create a

stable vessel into which to upload the recorded brain of his dying daughter Mary. When Caity Lotz's compassionate, principled computer scientist Ava (her name a reference to the Bible's primal mother) starts working with Vincent, bringing with her a pioneering program that learns intuitively from its interactions with others, the stage is set either for the emergence of the most terrifyingly efficient weapon ever seen – or a radical reconfiguration of the world along refreshingly matriarchal lines.

This science fiction from writer/director Caradog James (*Little White Lies*, 2006) offsets its modest budget with big ideas and an unusual feminist slant. For as Thomson's bunkered fascism is replaced by an open spirit of dance, play and communication, we are shown, in *The Machine's* final images, a new model of the family, of male-female relations and of global politics: a dawn ushered in by mother – and daughter – while father is left merely watching from the sidelines. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

John Giwa-Amu

Written by

Caradog James

Director of Photography

Nicolaj Bruel

Editor

Matt Platts-Mills

Production Designer

Erik Rehl

Music

Tom Raybould

Production

Sound Mixer

Malcolm Davies

Costume Designer

Chrissie Pegg

©Red and Black Films
Production
Companies
Content Media
Corporation presents
a Red and Black Films
& Altar production
in association with
The Ideas Factory
and Welsh Assembly
Government
A Red and Black film
In association with
Graham Associates
Developed with the

Siwan Morris

Lucy
Nicola Reynolds

Joan
Jade Croot

Mary
Jonathan

Christian Byrne

Tim

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Red and Black Films

Britain, the future. Amid an escalating cold war with China, cyberneticist Dr Vincent McCarthy experiments with neural implants in war-damaged soldiers, held against their will, in an attempt to create an android fighting machine. Vincent also secretly hopes to build an artificial host into which to upload the brain of his ailing daughter Mary. Pressured by his Ministry of Defence handler Thomson, Vincent enlists the help of computer scientist Ava. However, when Ava starts snooping into Thomson's unethical cyborg-building scheme, Thomson arranges her assassination. Vincent completes Ava's artificial brain and has her features copied on to the Machine. Conscious but naive, the Machine falls in love with Vincent. With Vincent distracted by Mary's death, Thomson activates a military program in the Machine, turning it into a reluctant yet highly efficient killer. Worried by the Machine's independent thinking, Thomson blackmails Vincent into shutting down its consciousness, using as leverage the last electronic record of Mary's brain. However, Vincent and the Machine trick Thomson, and the Machine leads an uprising of the cyborg soldiers against Thomson's men. The Machine spares Thomson but destroys his upper brain function. Later, Mary, now uploaded on to a tablet, watches the coming dawn with her mother the Machine; Vincent watches from a distance, unable to keep up intellectually with his new family.

The Monuments Men

USA/United Kingdom/Germany 2014

Director: George Clooney

Certificate 12A 118m 13s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

The Monuments Men has everything going for it. It has a perfectly fascinating, little-known true story at its heart – that of a team of international (though mostly American) art scholars formed at the end of WWII to go into harm's way to protect Europe's endangered cultural treasures. It showcases a squad of charismatic A-list stars and universally likeable character actors, and has for scenery the Continental countryside and a host of world masterpieces. So why does it try so damn hard?

You can smell the desperation. *The Monuments Men*'s initial awards-season release date was pushed back some months while George Clooney, who directed, co-wrote and stars as Lieutenant Frank Stokes, worked to tack down the tricky seriocomic tone. The solutions he seems to have come up with are belabouring, overworking or needlessly crosscutting, all the while hopefully slathering on Alexandre Desplat's soundtrack like a balm that can fix everything. In the middle of a scene where Private Preston Savitz (Bob Balaban) has been caught dead-to-rights by a wandering, starving German soldier, Clooney cuts away abruptly to a bit of character-building chit-chat between Stokes and his Jewish German-American translator (Dimitri Leonidas). When Lieutenant Jean-Claude Clermont (Jean Dujardin) is fatally wounded in a skirmish and Sergeant Walter Garfield (John Goodman) desperately drives through the countryside looking for assistance, Clooney's narration hops on to the soundtrack to deliver the man's eulogy before he's even dead, writing out in triplicate a point that's already been eloquently made by Goodman's forlorn expression.

These directorial interventions, undertaken with the evident intention of injecting energy into the film, only draw further attention to what's missing: the movie is dead on the screen. Such strenuous effort shouldn't be required on a film that, given what it has to work with, needs to do little other than *be*. There's a moment when *The Monuments Men* seems to understand perfectly the resources it has at its disposal, when Lieutenant James Granger (Matt Damon) has stepped on a mine and his cohorts gather around to gingerly assess the situation. It's a delicate moment, and the scene is handled with a light touch that's missing elsewhere. It's one of the only times Clooney steps back to let this rather remarkable comic ensemble – himself, Balaban, Goodman and Bill Murray – play together as *an ensemble*.

The Monuments Men is a film undertaken with evident reverence for its subjects and their mission, but reverence can be a hefty millstone around a movie's neck. Clooney has always had a pedantic streak, even or especially evident in his best-received work, 2005's *Good Night, and Good Luck*. Here that stodgy impulse compels him to squander precious screen time on spelling out truths that should be self-evident to the vast majority of adult viewers — such as the fact that the Third Reich was filled with a pretty nasty bunch of characters, or that the world heritage of art is, gosh darn it, something worth protecting. "It seems the Nazis took better care of paintings than they did of people," intones Clooney's voiceover at one point. Do you think so?



Dead on arrival: Matt Damon, Hugh Bonneville, George Clooney

While Clooney is reiterating the obvious, opportunities go marching by one after another. The comedy seems almost to have been hushed out of respect, and punchlines plop with a wet fizz. Save for a scene in which Clermont and Garfield 'take out' a boy sniper, little is done with the inherent absurdity of the premise: a bunch of middle-aged scholars and aesthetes finding themselves in way over their (egg)heads in a life-or-death situation. In Balaban and Murray we have the Mutt and Jeff pairing of all time, and practically nothing is done with it. I'm not suggesting that Clooney should've set out to do a remake of wartime romp *Kelly's Heroes* (1970) but, given what he's come up with, there might be worse tactics. And if it's a film of ideas that Clooney wanted, why the same old sonorous sentiments about Art? Why not touch on the particular relationship that Americans have with the European artistic heritage that at once does and doesn't belong to them, the clash between German *Kultur* and Yank culture? For all his

speechifying, Clooney never finds cinematic means to evoke the almost physical agony of helplessly standing by while culture is lost, as Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451*, for example, does.

The undeniable fact of *The Monuments Men*'s misallocation of talent has probably given the movie a worse reputation than it deserves; if you can manage to stop thinking what it could have been, there are things to like about what it is. It's sympathetic in its aims, and earnest – probably too much so. Cate Blanchett, playing a French art historian loosely based on the real Rose Valland, makes an impression in a handful of scenes, and Dujardin delivers some finely nuanced line readings, including a bit of blithe cultural chauvinism. By its last act, *The Monuments Men* has halfway recovered from its dreadfully miscalibrated opening – despite the insistent buoyancy, I haven't seen a movie seem to take so long getting to the title card since *Blissfully Yours*. But by then, this is one artwork that it's too late to save.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Grant Heslov
George Clooney
Screenplay

George Clooney
Grant Heslov
Based on the book
by Robert M. Edsel
with Bret Witter

Director of Photography

Phedon Papamichael
Edited by

Stephen Mirrione

Production Designer

Jim Bissell

Music

Alexandre Desplat

Sound Mixer

Edward Tise

Costume Designer

Louise Frogley

©Columbia Pictures
Industries, Inc. and
Twentieth Century

Fox Film Corporation

Production Companies

Fox 2000 Pictures

and Columbia

Pictures present
a Smokehouse
production
A co-production
between Obelisk
Productions
Limited and Studio
Babelsburg
Made in association
with TSG

Entertainment

Executive Producer

Barbara A. Hall

CAST

George Clooney

Frank Stokes

Matt Damon

James Granger

Bill Murray

Richard Campbell

John Goodman

Walter Garfield

Jean Dujardin

Jean Claude

Clermont

Bob Balaban

Preston Savitz

Hugh Bonneville

Donald Jeffries

Dimitri Leonidas
Sam Epstein
Cate Blanchett
Claire Simone

**Dolby Digital/
Datasat/SDDS**
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
20th Century Fox
International (UK)

10,639 ft +8 frames

The US and Europe, the end of WWII. Frank Stokes, an American art conservationist, convinces President Roosevelt to allow him to assemble a team of experts to go to Europe to protect endangered art treasures. The group includes Metropolitan Museum of Art curator James Granger, sculptor Walter Garfield, Chicago architect Richard Campbell, Frenchman Jean-Claude Clermont and Englishman Donald Jeffries. Arriving in France, Granger enters newly liberated Paris and tries to get information as to the whereabouts of missing works from Claire Simone, an art historian who is initially uncooperative, as she fears the Americans want to confiscate the art for themselves. Jeffries and then Clermont are killed in action. Campbell stumbles into the home of former SS man Viktor Stahl and recovers a map with clues to the location of missing masterworks. Hearing of Stahl's arrest, Simone softens her attitude towards the Americans and reveals the detailed record she has kept of looted artworks. The team decode Stahl's map and discover that the Germans have been hiding their plunder in salt mines. Crossing Germany, the team have to rush to retrieve the Ghent Altarpiece and Michelangelo's Madonna and Child, located in what will soon be a Soviet-occupied zone.

Back in the US, Stokes reflects that the loss of life was worthwhile to save these works of art.

Mr. Peabody and Sherman

USA 2014
Director: Rob Minkoff
Certificate U 92m 26s

Reviewed by Andrew Osmund

With the continuing flood of family CGI cartoon releases, it's increasingly hard for any of them to stand out, though Disney's hugely popular *Frozen* was a recent exception. *Mr. Peabody and Sherman*, a new film from DreamWorks, is far more ordinary, a time-travel adventure that dashes through cartoon versions of Ancient Egypt, Renaissance Italy and the Trojan War with much high-speed flying and mayhem. The film's main whimsy is its choice of protagonists: a talking genius dog (Mr Peabody, drily voiced by Ty Burrell) and his adopted human son Sherman. Both are based on characters from the *Rocky & Bullwinkle* TV cartoons of the 50s and 60s.

The cartoon fans who recognise the pair will appreciate the film's caricatures and cartoon gaggery, as when multiple Peabodys play an orchestra of random instruments, recalling Disney's old Goofy shorts. Unfortunately, the plotting is careless; the main characters don't make much sense and the father-son relationship is almost incoherent. (Peabody takes Sherman to perilous points in history yet is meant to be over-protective) Peabody and Sherman are amiable enough on a TV cartoon level but neither they, nor the adult gags about Clinton and Oedipus, are likely to give the film a long life.

As a time-travel comedy, *Mr. Peabody and Sherman* hews perilously close to the live-action *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure* (1989). The articulate canine protagonist inadvertently makes the film feel like a softer-edged version of the cartoon sitcom *Family Guy*, which frequently takes its cast on time-travel capers of their own.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Alex Schwartz
Denise Nolan
Cascino
Screenplay
Craig Wright
Based on Peabody's
Improbable History from the
TV series *Rocky & Friends* produced
by Jay Ward
Sherman and
Peabody are based
upon the characters
and format created
by Ted Key

Visual Consultant
Guillermo Navarro
Editor
Michael Andrews
Production Designer
David James
Music
Danny Elfman
Sound Designers
Richard King
Michael Babcock
Animation Supervisors
Antony Gray
Anthony Hodgeson
Bryce McGovern
Robyn Powell
Jason Spencer-

Galsworthy
©DreamWorks
Animation LLC
Production Company
DreamWorks Animation SKG
Executive Producers
Tiffany Ward
Eric Ellerhogen
Jason Clark

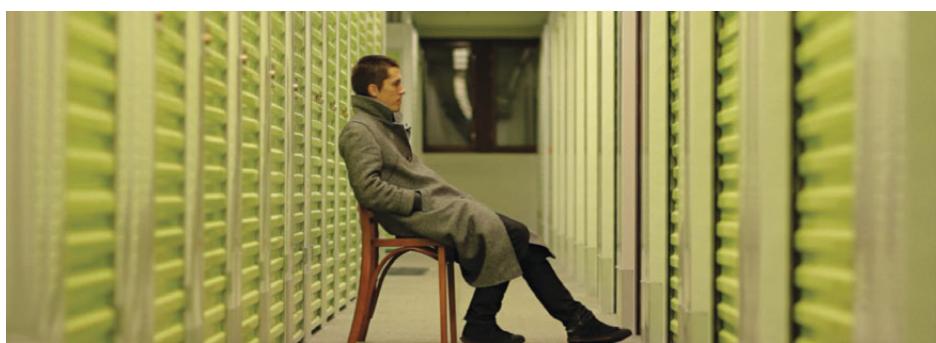
VOICE CAST

Ty Burrell
Peabody
Max Charles
Sherman
Ariel Winter
Penny Peterson
Stephen Colbert
Paul Peterson
Leslie Mann
Patty Peterson
Stanley Tucci
Leonardo da Vinci
Allison Janney
Ms Grunion
Mel Brooks
Albert Einstein
Patrick Warburton
Agamemnon
Stephen

In a cartoon New York, genius dog Mr Peabody adopts a foundling human boy called Sherman, and raises him with the help of a time machine. When Sherman takes a girl, Penny, into the past, Peabody must save the day while learning how to be a better father.

My Stuff

Finland/Sweden 2013
Director: Petri Luukkainen



The naked spur: Petri Luukkainen

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Watching this engaging documentary about the vices and occasional virtues of the accumulation of personal property, I was reminded of a Lenny Henry monologue about a standard form of greeting among the Wolof tribe of Ethiopia, where polite enquiries are made about the well-being of one's possessions as well as oneself – something wholly natural if these consist of a house and a goat. Henry imagined a British equivalent that began "How are you? And your BMW? Your wife's Renault? Your two heated towel-rails? Your Gaggia cappuccino-maker?" which could go on for hours.

Twenty-six-year-old Finnish filmmaker protagonist Petri Luukkainen opens with a similar *reductio ad absurdum* in which he reduces his personal possessions to just his flat and its permanent fixtures. Everything else is transferred into a storage facility, and for a year

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Petri Luukkainen
Anssi Pertala
Idea/Screenwriter
Petri Luukkainen
Director of Photography
Jesse Jokinen
Editor
Altti Sjögren
Music
Timo Lassy
Sound Recordist
Juho Luukkainen
©Unikino

Production Companies
Unikino present
Production Company: Unikino
Co-production Company: Tuotantohti Elävakuva
Suport: Suomen Elokuvasäätiö, AVEK
In association with YLE, UR
Executive Producer
Petri Luukkainen

In Colour [2.35:1] Subtitles
Distributor
Day for Night
Finnish theatrical title
Tavaratalvias

Helsinki, the present. Filmmaker Petri Luukkainen feels that he owns too many things and commences a lifestyle-challenging experiment inspired by his grandmother's frugal existence: he will put all his personal possessions into storage and spend the next year retrieving just one item per day, and will not purchase anything new. His family and friends (mother, younger brother Juho, friends Eero, Jesse and Pete) rally round, especially in the early days when he lacks sufficient clothes to go shopping himself. His cousin Little Jesse asks when he's going to get a girlfriend. After 212 days, Luukkainen goes on a date with Maija, which turns into a full-blown romance. Towards the end of the year, his grandmother is taken into a nursing home. Luukkainen and Juho sift through her things and realise their essential unimportance. On day 365, Luukkainen concludes that a hundred of his items are essential and another hundred give him joy and comfort but the rest are unimportant. Although the storage room still has a great deal in it, he locks it and walks away.

he can retrieve just one item a day and cannot purchase anything new besides food and daily essentials, the idea being that in restricting himself in this way he will force himself to learn the relative importance of 'stuff'. This is graphically emphasised in the opening shots, in which the naked Luukkainen runs through wintry Helsinki at night and manages to retrieve a long coat before succumbing to exposure (or arrest for the indecent kind).

The film's first half is the strongest, as Luukkainen retrieves just enough to carry out such tasks as shopping, getting up on time and returning to work – after a week, he has enough clothes to pass for normal, missing underwear and socks notwithstanding. There's not much recourse to survivalist tactics, although a 'fridge' is created from an external windowsill. He succumbs fairly quickly to the lure of the laptop (ruefully acknowledging that it's almost impossible to maintain a viable lifestyle in a hi-tech, highly connected society without one) but he surprises himself by lasting a full four months without a phone. Although the fact that *My Stuff* wasn't self-filmed might seem out of step with the rules, Jesse Jokinen and Pasi Ylirisku's widescreen cinematography is appreciably more stylish than the average handheld video diary.

After the halfway mark the film slightly loses its way. Whether an upfront decision on his part or an insistence on hers, the fact that Luukkainen's new girlfriend Maija doesn't fully appear on camera until the very end means that a notionally life-changing romance feels peripheral, as though she's yet another piece of ephemeral property. Whereas *Recipes for Disaster* (2008), a documentary about a similar experiment (John Webster's attempt to eliminate oil and its by-products from his family's lifestyle) was enlivened by the presence of Webster's sceptical and sarcastic Finnish wife, *My Stuff* is more solipsistic, and it's only when Luukkainen's grandmother (whose frugal lifestyle inspired the experiment) is taken into a nursing home that it develops a strong emotional arc.

Still, Luukkainen makes a lot of worthwhile points, not least the fact that notionally inessential items also have value. It's only when his flat reacquires decorative fripperies like framed pictures that it looks as though it's inhabited by a human being, and he reaches a refreshingly unhairshirted conclusion that out of the 200 items he considered worth retrieving, half are purely for "joy and comfort", as important as the unarguable essentials if not taken to excess.

Need for Speed

USA/India 2014
Director: Scott Waugh
Certificate 12A 130m 28s

Reviewed by Jamie Graham

Based on the 20 or so Electronic Arts videogames released since 1994, *Need for Speed* replicates key gameplay features: car-body customisation, muscle cars racing over varying terrain, police pursuits, obnoxious opponents... A \$66 million B-picture, it arrives in the slipstream of Universal's increasingly popular *Fast & Furious* franchise and dedicates much of its overlong running time to gleaming vehicles hurtling through cityscapes, green pastures and Monument Valley to the rolling thunder of amplified foley work and an urgent percussive score.

Breaking Bad's Aaron Paul is a likeable presence as terse street racer Tobey Marshall, his high forehead, childish features and diminutive frame making for an unlikely (anti-) hero. Less successful are a tepid Dominic Cooper as bad-boy rival Dino and Imogen Poots's English car dealer Julia, her plum-accented buffoonery allowing for culture-clash badinage as she rides shotgun on Marshall's cross-country odyssey.

Need for Speed at least has the wit to puncture the speech bubbles encasing its macho ejaculations. ("You like that car? We built that," is one chat-up line. "Oh, so you're a mechanic," fires the reply.) Whether it also supports a counterculture vision as authentic as those posited in *Vanishing Point*, *Two-Lane Blacktop* and the other road movies of the late 60s and early 70s that it consciously evokes is, however, another matter. S

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

John Gatins
Patrick O'Brien
Mark Sourian
Screenplay
George Gatins
Story
George Gatins
John Gatins
Based on the video game series created by Electronic Arts

Director of Photography

Shane Hurlbut

Edited by

Paul Rubell
Scott Waugh

Production Designer

Jon Hutmam

Music

Nathan Furst

Production Sound Mixer

Gene Martin

Costume Designer

Ellen Mirojnick

Stunt Co-ordinator

Lance Gilbert

©Dreamworks II

Distribution Co., LLC

Production Companies
Dreamworks Pictures and Reliance Entertainment present an Electronic Arts/ Bandito Brothers/ Mark Sourian/ John Gatins production

Executive Producers

Stuart Besser
Scott Waugh
Max Leitman
Frank Gibeau
Patrick Soderlund
Tim Moore

CAST

Aaron Paul
Tobey Marshall
Dominic Cooper
Dino Brewster
Imogen Poots
Julia Maddon
Ramon Rodriguez
Joe Peck
Michael Keaton

Monarch

Harrison Gilbertson
Little Pete
Dolby Digital/ Datasat/ SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor

E1 Films
11,742 ft +0 frames

Paranoia

USA/France/India 2013
Director: Robert Luketic

Reviewed by Patrick Fahy

A lacklustre industrial espionage thriller set among mobile-phone corporations, *Paranoia* pushes the usual buttons to no avail. Ambitious project leader Adam (one-note Liam Hemsworth) is coerced by an unscrupulous billionaire into spying on a rival. As Adam's guilt grows (legally and morally), he hatches a plan to expose the corruption of both moguls. Director Robert Luketic (whose 2008 card-counting drama *21* scored better) clearly hopes for headline topicality with our hero's indignation about bosses pocketing "obscene bonuses", but there's nothing new about his plotting. Absolutely everything has been seen before – snooping in the boss's study, theft by memory stick, the lifted thumbprint granting access to the vault, and so on.

The film comes to life once, when in a hushed gentlemen's club bitter insults are traded between enemies Goddard (a virtually bald Harrison Ford, solid as always) and Wyatt (Gary Oldman, playing the gruff cockney boss as if rehearsing an Alan Sugar biopic). Yet even the title is wrong, since no character is actually paranoid; when Adam tears his flat apart looking for hidden cameras, there they are. *The Conversation* it ain't. S

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Alexandra Milchan
Scott Lambert
William D. Johnson
Deepak Nayar
Screenplay

Jason Hall
Barry L. Levy
Based on the novel by Joseph Finder

Director of Photography

David Tattersall
Edited by

Dany Cooper
Tracy Adams
Production Design

Missy Stewart
David Brisbin
Music

Junkie XL
Sound Mixer

David MacMillan
Costume Designer

Luca Mosca
©Paranoia Productions, LLC

Production Companies
Reliance Entertainment presents in association with IM

Global, Demarest Films and E Stars

Distribution an EMJAG Productions, Gaumont, Film 360 and Deepak Nayar production

A film by Robert Luketic

Executive Producers

Stuart Ford
Sam Englehardt
Sidonie Dumas
Christophe Riandeau
Allen Liu

William S. Beasley
David Greathouse
Douglas Urbanski

Ryan Kavanaugh
Tucker Tooley
CAST

Liam Hemsworth
Adam Cassidy

Gary Oldman
Nicholas Wyett
Amber Heard

Emma Jennings
Harrison Ford
Augustine 'Jock' Goddard

Lucas Till
Kevin

Embeth Davidtz

Dr Judith Bolton

Julian McMahon

Miles Meachum

Josh Holloway

Agent Gamble

Richard Dreyfuss

Frank Cassidy

Dolby Digital In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

E1 Films

Plot for Peace

South Africa 2013
Directors: Carlos Agulló, Mandy Jacobson
Certificate 12A 84m 26s

Reviewed by Ashley Clark

The story behind the late Nelson Mandela's release from prison has been covered, with varying degrees of detail, in Pete Travis's 2009 TV movie *Endgame* and Justin Chadwick's recent biopic *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom*. Both highlighted a complex series of political manoeuvres involving a wide-ranging cast of international characters, yet neither saw fit to mention Jean-Yves Ollivier, the Algerian-born French commodities trader who is cited in Carlos Agulló and Mandy Jacobson's *Plot for Peace* as the story's single most important figure.

Jacobson initially came across a two-minute clip of Ollivier while trawling through footage compiled by the African Oral History Archive (the organisation that funded this documentary) and the film replicates that sense of discovery by framing itself as an intrigue-fuelled political thriller. The opening moments have a noirish air to them, as Ollivier (in the present day) sits in a smoky hotel room, shuffling cards and making gnomic pronouncements – "Laying cards, that's my little secret, it resembles the world," and, "I create order from chaos." The film segues suddenly into a horrifying montage of police brutality in 1980s South Africa, and the juxtaposition makes the premise clear: this shadowy figure will use his cunning and connections to impose a sense of order on a violent, out-of-control situation.

Moving from subplot to subplot and taking in a variety of countries, the filmmakers marshal a vast amount of information in commendably adept fashion. Agulló, who also edited the film, deserves particular credit for keeping the transglobal narrative digestible and pacy, even if the sheer wealth of detail conveyed can sometimes make things difficult to follow for those without a working knowledge of geopolitics (and the complex intra-African situation) in the 1980s. The intricacies of Ollivier's exact role in influencing the withdrawal of Cuban and South African troops from Angola in 1988 prove particularly knotty. But *Plot for Peace* is often exciting: the story of the release from Angola of fearsome South



Holding the cards: Jean-Yves Ollivier

Mount Kisco, New York, 2011. Facing foreclosure on his garage, street racer Tobey Marshall repairs the Ford Mustang belonging to Dino, an old rival who now competes in Indy races. The pair, joined by Tobey's friend Pete, race for 'pink slips' (to win the loser's car) but Dino flees the scene after causing Pete's death, leaving Tobey to take the blame. Two years later, Tobey is released from jail. Bent on revenge, he has 45 hours to drive from New York to California to take part in a big race. He makes it, beating Dino in the climactic showdown driving the car that Dino drove on the day of Pete's death – evidence that leads to Dino's arrest.

 African reconnaissance commando Wynand du Toit is as gripping and fluidly edited as something from a Costa-Gavras film. Yet the film's premise proves tricky on moral grounds. Ollivier blithely claims that he ignored global sanctions and continued to do business with apartheid South Africa in order to keep it communicating with neighbouring countries: nothing, he argues, was possible without open communication. High-profile figures including Freddie Mercury and Queen, the England cricket team and – as covered in Joe Berlinger's terrific 2012 documentary *Under African Skies* – Paul Simon have been hauled over the coals for similar activity, but the filmmakers aren't interested in pressing Ollivier, instead trusting him – and hoping the audience will believe – that his efforts were unilaterally altruistic. (The film goes into very little detail about his personal business interests.) That said, plenty of impressive talking heads, including Winnie Mandela, appear to corroborate Ollivier's involvement, and the film makes an interesting link with his upbringing in Algeria: we discover that he and his family, along with a million other French people, had to flee the country when it gained independence in 1962. He is said to have seen a similar destiny for white South Africans.

A fascinating and often confounding work of non-fiction, *Plot for Peace* is a reminder that official histories both deserve and need to be challenged. At the same time, however, it functions as an unorthodox but unmistakable riff on the 'great man theory', prioritising a single person's narrative over collective effort. As impressive as Ollivier's achievements appear, it seems a stretch to suggest, as the film does, that he was single-handedly responsible for effecting the release of Nelson Mandela. When the contribution of others is sidelined in such a tale, it can't help but leave a slightly sour taste. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Mandy Jacobson
Script Writer
Stephen Smith
Directors of Photography
Rita Noriega
Diego Oliviero
Editor
Carlos Agulló
Music Composer

Antony Partos
Sound Designer
Gabriel Gutiérrez

©African Oral
History
Production Company
An African Oral
History production

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Trinity Filmed
Entertainment

7,599 ft +0 frames

A documentary about Algerian-born French commodities trader Jean-Yves Ollivier and his dealings with apartheid South Africa in the mid-1980s, when Nelson Mandela was in prison, violence was erupting in the townships and one of the Cold War's most vicious proxy conflicts was unfolding in Angola. Using a combination of archive footage and present-day interviews, the film shows how Ollivier used his connections to influence events, developing relationships with members of the ANC and becoming an adviser on African affairs to the then mayor of Paris Jacques Chirac. He organised a prisoner exchange in 1987 in Mozambique; the following year South African and Cuban troops began withdrawing from Angola. The film argues that this created a domino peace effect in the region. The film concludes with the release from jail of Mandela, who becomes South Africa's first democratically elected president.

RoboCop

USA/Canada 2014
Director: José Padilha
Certificate 12A 117m 40s

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

"This is the mother of all bad ideas," exclaims a character early in *RoboCop* – a self-reflexive one-liner that also does nicely as an epitaph for a worthless remake of a masterpiece. Twenty-seven years after Paul Verhoeven smartly torqued the heavy-metal chassis of American action cinema in the direction of satire, José Padilha's po-faced take on the material feels merely like assembly-line product.

Things are dire from the very first sequence, which nods to both the original *RoboCop* and Verhoeven's subsequent *Starship Troopers* (1997) by plunging us into a futuristic mediascape in which a rightwing pundit (Samuel L. Jackson) rants about his homeland's soft-on-crime stance before turning the show over to a perilously embedded TV reporter stationed in Iran to capture footage of American peacekeeping machines in action. This unfolds as a variation on the infamous 'ED-209' scene in the original *RoboCop*, in which a lumbering robot malfunctions in a corporate boardroom and mows down a junior executive in a hail of bullets. But where Verhoeven's version played out as a savage critique of a top-down corporate mentality wherein underlings are expendable, Padilha confuses the issue by having the drones fire less than indiscriminately on a group of suicide bombers.

To say that this attempt to repoliticise a Reagan-era artefact for the 21st century proves less than successful is an understatement. The cultural commentary of the original *RoboCop* may not have been subtle but at least it was coherent. Nothing in the remake makes

The Man Machine: Joel Kinnaman

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Marc Abraham
Eric Newman
Written by
Joshua Zetumer
Edward Neumeier
Michael Miner
Based on the 1987
motion picture written
by Edward Neumeier,
Michael Miner
Director of Photography
Joel Kramer
Visual Effects
Lula Carvalho
Edited by
Daniel Rezende
Peter McNulty

Production Designer
Martin Whist
Music
Pedro Bromfman
Supervising Sound Editor
Karen Baker Landers
Costume Designer
April Ferry
Supervising Stunt Co-ordinator
Joel Kramer
Visual Effects
Framestore
yU+co
Mr. X Inc.
Visual Effects/

Graphics Animation
Method Studios

©Metro-Goldwyn-
Mayer Pictures Inc.
and Sony Pictures
Entertainment
Production Companies
Metro-Goldwyn-
Mayer Pictures
and Columbia
Pictures present
A Strike
Entertainment
production
With the participation

of the Province of
Ontario Production
Services Tax Credit,
the Canadian Film
or Video Production
Services Tax Credit,
Québec Production
Services Tax Credit
Executive Producers
Bill Carraro
Roger Birnbaum

CAST

Joel Kinnaman
Alex Murphy,
'RoboCop'

Gary Oldman
Dr Dennett Norton
Michael Keaton
Raymond Sellars
Abbie Cornish
Clara Murphy
Jackie Earle Haley
Rick Mattox
Michael K. Williams
Jack Lewis
Jennifer Ehle
Liz Kline
Jay Baruchel
Torn Pope
Marianne Jean-Baptiste
Chief Karen Dean

Samuel L. Jackson
Pat Novak
Aimee Garcia
Jae Kim
Douglas Urbanski
Mayor Durant

Dolby Digital/
Datasat/SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

10,590 ft +0 frames

Detroit, the future. Weapons manufacturer OmniCorp (OCP) is publicly embarrassed when its peacekeeping drones in Iran massacre a group of insurgents, including an unarmed child, on live television. In response, CEO Raymond Sellars plans to unveil a half-human, half-robot product that will dispel public and government concerns about his machines. When detective Alex Murphy is mortally wounded by a car bomb set by gun-runner Antoine Vallon, Sellars chooses him for the 'RoboCop' project. Murphy is transported to China and outfitted with a robotic body that gives him superhuman strength and enhanced deductive abilities. After running tests, OCP's military tactician Rick Mattox

tells Sellars that Murphy is still too human in his decision-making, so Sellars persuades project supervisor Dr Norton to rewire his brain and make him more subservient. RoboCop is unveiled to the public and quickly tracks down and kills Vallon, but when he begins investigating malfeasance in his own department, Sellars decides to shut him down permanently. Norton privately confides to Murphy that he has been manipulated, prompting Murphy to track down Sellars at OCP headquarters. Sellars tells Murphy that his programming prohibits him from harming an OCP employee but Murphy shoots and kills him anyway. Norton repairs the damage to Murphy's suit and reunites him with his family.



sense, starting with the motivations of Omnicorp CEO Raymond Sellars (Michael Keaton), whose response to the Iran debacle is to commission a more media-friendly tactical asset – a machine with a human face. But when the Mob-sponsored assassination of crusading Detroit cop Alex Murphy (Joel Kinnaman) drops an appropriately flame-broiled guinea pig in his lap, Sellars decides that the new 'RoboCop' prototype created out of Murphy's remains isn't sleek and mechanical enough. In *RoboCop* 1.0, everything between Murphy's death and rebirth behind the visor happened in quick, comic-book strokes; here, Sellars keeps sending harried robotics scientist Norton (Gary Oldman) back to the drawing board.

This back-and-forth is boring to watch and it's also probably revealing of what went wrong with Padilha's film, which simultaneously feels fussed over and tossed off; individual scenes are meticulous while the overall shape of the story – which diverges from the source material by flipping the gender of Murphy's partner (Michael K. Williams) and increasing the presence of his wife (Abbie Cornish) and young son – is loose bordering on slovenly.

Kinnaman doesn't have any of Peter Weller's intriguingly hollowed-out presence but he's too self-effacing to be objectionable; on the other hand, Keaton, Jackson and especially Oldman give the sort of grandstanding performances that suggest veteran actors trying to give a stalled vehicle a jump-start. Jackson ultimately gets the film's one good laugh, which has his firebrand character being bleeped by his own network – a decent gag at the expense of the actor's famously profane screen persona. And yet the fact that this meek, PG-rated reboot of an enduringly extreme exploitation movie can't bring itself to drop even one F-bomb is pretty much the final word on its failure. ☀

The Rocket

Australia/Laos 2013
Director: Kim Mordaunt
Certificate 12A 95m 49s

Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley

Echoes of Benh Zeitlin's *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012) haunt documentarian Kim Mordaunt's debut feature, an energetic coming-of-age tale set half a world away from New Orleans but infused with a similar atmosphere of wetness and wonder. *The Rocket*'s action takes place in present-day Laos, though at times it looks like a fantastic sci-fi land – *Avatar*'s Pandora revealed to be Earth after all. As it begins, ten-year-old Ahlo's home is about to be flooded for the building of a second dam to match the existing futuristic structure that looms over the verdant landscape, and his family is to be relocated. An underwater sequence sees Ahlo swimming in the dam lake, skimming over roofs and rafters, the homes of the last locals to be moved on.

In Laotian superstition, Ahlo (sweet, strutting street kid Sitthiphon Disamoe) may be a 'cursed child', a twin whose sibling was stillborn. When tragedy strikes en route to his family's new home, the predictions seem to be borne out. Then the "new house, good land and generous cash payout" that Ahlo's father has been promised via a noxious corporate video turns out to be a squalid shanty made up of corrugated tin and torn sheets. Electricity is promised but is available only to company employees. Ahlo's incandescent Fury of a grandmother (the marvellous Bunsri Yindi, best known to international audiences from 2003's *Ong-Bak*) pronounces him responsible; their neighbours, seeking a scapegoat for their misery, run him out of camp.

The subsequent Disneyesque odyssey, in which a grief-stricken and guilty child wanders the wilderness before restoring his good name, is lent freshness and edge by the setting in present-day Laos, a country perched on the brink of industrialisation yet still haunted by the legacy of war. Dormant bombs lie scattered across its gorgeous landscapes, "sleeping tigers" that lend the film its most potent and surreal imagery – such as an elephant's trunk wrapped around the thick, phallic husk of an unexploded missile. Guiding Ahlo and his family on their precarious journey is rice-wine-soused, James Brown-obsessed Uncle Purple



Flower child: Sitthiphon Disamoe

(Thaip Phongam), named for the livid suit he wears in tribute to his idol – a gift, we learn, from the Americans with whom he collaborated during the war. Purple is the ghost of Laos's past, but whether he's a good spirit or a bad one is not always clear. His parting gift to Ahlo is to pass on the bomb-making techniques the Americans taught him, so that Ahlo can enter a rocket-making competition.

The Rocket builds on Mordaunt's 2007 documentary *Bomb Harvest*, which followed an Australian bomb-disposal specialist working in Laos and featured the children who collected bombs to sell as scrap. Its fable-like quality is both offset and redoubled by the documentary techniques Mordaunt employs, while the child's-eye perspective captured by DP Andy Commis through the use of a mostly handheld camera lends both adults and objects an off-kilter disproportion.

The combination of *vérité* and fairytale calls to mind Clio Barnard's recent *The Selfish Giant*, another film in which scrap metal holds a dangerous allure for its child protagonists. *The Rocket* lacks that film's nuanced performances and packs a far softer punch, but the dogged optimism offered by this glimpse of a country caught between opposing forces is nonetheless exhilarating. ☺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Sylvia Wilczynski

Written by

Kim Mordaunt

Director of Photography

Andrew Commis

Film Editor

Nick Meyers

Production Designer

Pete Baxter

Original Music

Caitlin Yeo

Sound Design

Sam Petty

Brooke Trezise

Costume Designer

Woranun Pueakpun

©Screen Australia,

Screen NSW, Ton

Enterprises Pty

Ltd, Ecosture Pty

Ltd, Colin & Karen

McCumstie and Red

Lamp Films Pty Ltd

Production Companies

Screen Australia

presents a Red Lamp

Films production

in association with

Screen NSW

in association with

Curious Film, LevelK

ApS, Ton Enterprises

& Triphet Rookachat,

Ecosture,

McCumstie @

Margaritaville Fund,

Milsearch Pty &

Milsearch Lao

Principal investor

development

& production

Screen Australia

Executive Producers

Bridget Ikin

Michael Wrenn

David Macfarlane

Triphet Rookachat

CAST

Sitthiphon Disamoe

Ahlo

Luongnam

Kaosainam

Kia

Thaip Phongam

Purple

Bunsri Yindi

Taitok

Sumrit Warin

Toma

Alice Keohavong

Mali

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Eureka Entertainment

8,623 ft +8 frames

Laos, the recent past. A woman, Mali, gives birth to twins but one of them is stillborn. She ignores her mother's advice that she should kill the survivor (according to Laotian superstition, one twin is cursed and one lucky) naming him Ahlo. Some ten years later, Ahlo's family are to be relocated due to the construction of a dam that will flood their ancestral home. Ahlo's grandmother Taitok suspects that he is the cause of this bad luck, and when Mali is killed en route to their new home she declares him evil. The relocation camp turns out to be a wasteland without electricity or running water. Ahlo befriends nine-year-old orphan Kia and her uncle Purple. His bodge attempt to route electricity to their home results in his family being driven out of the camp. With Kia and Purple they travel across a countryside littered with unexploded bombs to a village where a rocket-building competition is to take place, with a cash prize for the winner. Ahlo enters the competition and, with help from his father Toma and Purple, he triumphs. As his rocket explodes, long hoped-for rain falls on the village. Ahlo is declared not only the winner of the competition but also a bringer of luck.

The Stag

Ireland 2013
Director: John Butler
Certificate 15 94m 19s

Reviewed by Anna Smith

"I don't enjoy being in all-male company," says groom-to-be Fionan (Hugh O'Conor) in this Irish comedy. It's a refreshing twist on the frat-boy antics of the likes of *The Hangover*, and some laughs ensue as Fionan and his relatively sensible group of friends try to enjoy a stag weekend without the interference of the bride's macho brother 'the Machine' (co-writer Peter McDonald). A standout scene sees Fionan's best man Davin (*Sherlock*'s Andrew Scott) trying to dissuade the interloper from joining the gang, leaving a voicemail claiming that the weekend will be a sober walking retreat. But the idea of the Machine proves funnier than the reality: his reckless alpha-male antics are essentially a series of so-so sketches involving the usual suspects: nudity, drugs and farmers with shotguns (debut writer-director John Butler being best known for TV sketch show *Your Bad Self*).

The dialogue is fitfully unconvincing but *The Stag* is better when tackling dramatic subjects, including the Machine's soft side, a gay character's relationship with his father and Davin's attachment to the bride. As Davin, Scott is by far the most interesting character, and neither the script nor the performances help us understand why Amy Huberman's Ruth would choose the drab, self-absorbed Fionan over him. It's a problem from which this well-intentioned film never recovers. ☺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Rebecca O'Flanagan

Robert Walpole

Written by

John Butler

Peter McDonald

Director of Photography

Peter Robertson

Film Editor

John O'Connor

Production Designer

Ferdia Murphy

Music

Stephen Rennicks

Hugh Drumm

Sound Recordist

Hugh Fox

Costume Designer

Kathy Strachan

©Treasure

Entertainment Ltd

Production Companies

Bord Scannán na

HÉireann/Irish Film

Board in association

with Windmill

Lane Pictures

present a Treasure

In Colour [1.85:1]

Distributor

Arrow Film Distributors Ltd

8,488 ft +8 frames

CAST

Andrew Scott

Davin

Hugh O'Conor

Fionan

Brian Gleeson

Simon

Andrew Bennett

Large Kevin

Michael Legge

Little Kevin

Amy Huberman

Ruth

Peter McDonald

The Machine

Marcella Plunkett

Uli

Justine Mitchell

Linda

Ireland, the present. At the insistence of his fiancée Ruth, metrosexual Fionan reluctantly agrees to have a stag do prior to their wedding. Ruth also insists that he invite her notorious brother, known as 'the Machine'. The men go hiking and camping, and Fionan and his friends gradually warm to the initially obnoxious Machine. After taking MDMA, the Machine reveals that he has separated from his wife. Fionan's best man Davin, who is Ruth's ex, confesses to Fionan that he is still in love with her. Fionan reacts angrily. The Machine reconciles with his wife. Davin and Fionan make amends and the wedding goes ahead successfully.

Starred Up

United Kingdom 2013
Director: David Mackenzie
Certificate 18 105m 45s

Reviewed by Michael Pattison

See Feature
on page 28

One of the most memorable scenes in *Scum* (1979), Alan Clarke's seminal hard-hitting borstal-set drama, is when Ray Winstone's protagonist calmly stuffs two snooker balls into a sock and, after biding his time in the corner of a recreation room, whacks his chief antagonist's second-in-command across the face with them. Though not entirely presented in one take, the scene – as well as the film at large – is notable for Clarke's distinguished use of the roaming camera, which bookends the violence itself with otherwise lush movements in and out of the room, where fellow inmates play billiards and table tennis.

There's a similar moment in *Starred Up*, David Mackenzie's muscular and moving eighth feature, in which protagonist Eric Love (Jack O'Connell) struts with familiar brooding intent past the pool and ping-pong tables that clutter his prison ward. Though the homage is clear, the scene concludes without explosive violence: Eric's purpose in walking from his own cell to another inmate's is merely to steal a lighter. When the lighter's owner discovers the theft, Eric looks on from his cell, visibly satisfied with his own creativity.

Not that *Starred Up* is devoid of violence. Although there's a wry and even likeable mischief about Eric, the youngest addition to a prison ward of high-risk offenders, we see early on just how prepared he is for a life of brutality, as he meticulously fashions a weapon out of a small blade and a toothbrush and artfully places it inside the tube light fixed to his ceiling. In fact, Eric is *over*-prepared: when he misinterprets the movements of a fellow inmate who enters his cell, he knocks him unconscious with savage instinct. Rightfully expecting a pitiless retaliation from prison staff, he arms himself with two coshes and greases his bare torso so as to make his capture difficult. This is a man adept at resisting authority.

Starred Up is the first feature-length script by Jonathan Asser, whose previous experience working with violent inmates lends the film both its plausibly gruelling edge and its commendably optimistic view of young offenders. Asser's surrogate character is Oliver (Rupert Friend), a psychotherapist who oversees an anger-management class with a number of the younger inmates. Repeatedly placing himself on the line, Oliver is one of three authority figures competing for Eric's attention, alongside Haynes (Sam Spruell), the cruel prison governor for whom our protagonist is beyond rehabilitation, and Eric's own father Neville (Ben Mendelsohn), the de facto head con whose cell is conveniently located on the same wing.

The question of which of these conflicting influences will prevail is at the heart of Mackenzie's film, and a gut-churning dread consequently hangs over every scene, as Eric learns the merits of counting to ten while jealousies, misunderstandings and petty agendas run rife around him. As someone vulnerable and potentially violent, one whose go-to emotions when faced with adversity and/or authority are



Borstal boy: Jack O'Connell

anger and aggression, O'Connell is excellent. Eric begins the film palpably hurt but outwardly fearless; his growth in confidence and happiness is affectingly matched by O'Connell's own shift, from reluctantly subdued newcomer opposite the menacingly domineering Mendelsohn to an actor with an absolute command of the brawny *mise en scène* around him.

In its final stages, *Starred Up*'s emphasis on how institutionalisation is counterintuitively synonymous with marginalisation begins to unravel, and the intricately symbolic standoff – between punitive power and redemptive empowerment – veers into more directly

histrionic territory. Thereafter the inclusion of characters such as Dennis (Peter Ferdinando), the ward's bespectacled, chess-playing kingpin, seems in retrospect designed only to help the narrative towards its resolution.

Still, by the time the father-son symmetries, distinctions and symbolic redemptions arrive, the film has left its vivid mark. For all its shockingly graphic bloodshed and atmosphere of pervasive doom, the moments when *Starred Up* grabs the jugular most are the scenes in Oliver's anger-management classes, where Eric sits with people of similar age and vulnerability – and learns to bare his soul and smile. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Gillian Berrie

Written by

Jonathan Asser

Director of Photography

Michael McDonough

Edited by

Jake Roberts

Nick Emerson

Production Designer

Tom McCullagh

Music

Tony Doogan

David Mackenzie

Production Sound Mixer

Ronan Hill

Costume Designer

Susan Scott

©Starred Up Films

Limited and Channel

Four Television

Corporation

Production Companies

Film4 presents in

association with

Creative Scotland,

Quickfire Films,

LipSync Productions

and Northern Ireland

Screen a Sigma

Films production

Peter Ferdinand

Dennis Spencer

Gershwyn

Eustach Jr

Des

Ashley Chin

Ryan

Raphael Sowole

Jago

Gilly Gilchrist

Principle Officer Scott

Tommy McDonnell

Officer Self

Frederick Schmidt

Officer Gentry

Sian Breckin

Governor Cardew

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

20th Century Fox

International (UK)

9,517 ft +8 frames

CAST

Jack O'Connell

Eric Love

Ben Mendelsohn

Neville Love

Rupert Friend

Oliver Baumer

Sam Spruell

Deputy Governor

Haynes

Anthony Welsh

Hassan

David Ajala

Tyrene

High-risk young offender Eric arrives at an adult prison. He is placed in a single cell and is wary of fellow inmates. Eric's father Neville, who is serving a lengthy sentence on the same wing, takes it upon himself to school Eric in order to speed up his release. When he hospitalises an inmate he mistakenly assumes is about to attack him, Eric readies himself for a vicious retaliation from prison staff, led by Governor Haynes. The resulting brawl interrupts an anger-management class overseen by prison psychotherapist Oliver, who pleads with Haynes not to take further action. Haynes agrees to allow Eric to attend Oliver's sessions, and Eric begins to learn anger-management techniques.

Neville grows suspicious of his son's newfound friendships. He is also curious as to how anger-management sessions could improve his own temper. When Neville attends the class, however, his embarrassment gets the better of him and a confrontation with his son erupts. Haynes uses the incident as an opportunity to withdraw Eric from therapy. Angered, Eric pursues his father and a fight ensues. When Eric also attacks Neville's mentor, head con Dennis, Haynes arranges to have him beaten and hanged in a fake suicide. Realising that his son's life is in danger, Neville kills Dennis and races to the cell where Haynes is hanging Eric. With Neville threatening to kill him, Haynes agrees to cut Eric down. Later, while recovering, Eric sees his father being transferred to another prison. The pair embrace.

A Story of Children and Film

United Kingdom 2013
Director: Mark Cousins
Certificate PG 105m 35s

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

See Feature
on page 32

Much is revealed about Mark Cousins's beguiling film-essay before the multilingual opening titles have finished their inaugural parade. For starters, there's the cautiously indefinite article, at least in the English title, as if to acknowledge that the topic's ineffable vastness demands a certain humility. Secondly, there are the rippling note-clusters of one of Olivier Messiaen's 'Vingt regards sur l'enfant-Jésus' on the soundtrack, music that combines ear-pleasing accessibility with immense harmonic intricacy, mirroring the subject's surface appeal and unfathomable depths.

For well over a century, filmmakers have been irresistibly drawn to children, and Cousins rightly suggests that this is a by-product of the medium's unique ability to capture unrepeatable moments in time. The age range of the film clips included here (from a heartbroken Jackie Coogan in 1921's *The Kid* to a dressing-up contretemps in 2012's *Moonrise Kingdom*) means that many of the featured children will be long dead and most others grown up, and even the youngest will soon be in their teens, but they'll remain children for as long as their films survive. As will Cousins's own relatives, Laura and Ben, filmed by a camcorder as they interact over a recently constructed marble run, displaying many of the traits featured in the clips that comprise most of the running time.

Those familiar with Cousins's cinematic preoccupations (regularly expressed in these pages) will correctly predict that the 53 films will span a wide range of styles and originating countries (23 all told). Some are famous – *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), *The 400 Blows* (1959), *The Night of the Hunter* (1955), *The Spirit of the Beehive* (1973) – but many are considerably less so: what other non-Albanian filmmaker would name-check even one film from that country, never mind two? (Xhanfize Keko's *The Newest City in the World* from 1974 and *Tomka and His Friends* from 1977, since you ask.) It's vanishingly unlikely that anyone besides Cousins will have seen all these films beforehand: he offers much to track down. He also praises critically sidelined filmmakers such as Astrid Henning-Jensen, whose fantasy *Palle Alone in the World* (1949) is cited more than once.

The crosscutting is by theme rather than by age or nationality: the opening collection on shyness finds common ground between Spielberg's *E.T.*, Shimizu Hiroshi's *Children in the Wind* (1937), Jane Campion's *An Angel at My Table* (1990) and Girish Kasaravalli's *The Ritual* (1977). Cousins's voice is a constant presence on the DVD-commentary-style soundtrack, highlighting similarities between the films and pointing out telling details – in *The Ritual*, for example, the glint of a schoolboy's earring establishes him as a Brahmin and leads into the next section on social class.

The child's imaginative life is a recurring theme, expressed through performance, storytelling and the realisation of dreams. Cousins contrasts the carefully rehearsed Shirley Temple in *Curly Top* (1935) with the more believably artless Margaret O'Brien in *Meet Me in St Louis* (1944) and a boy who's never been filmed before



The child in time: *The White Balloon*

in Cousins's own documentary *The First Movie* (2009). The expressionist shadows of *The Night of the Hunter* loom large, as does the anarchy of *Zéro de conduite* (1933), the wide-eyed wonderment of Ana Torrent in *The Spirit of the Beehive* and a startling street-shuffle in Djibril Diop Mambéty's *The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun* (1999). A railway carriage in *Emil and the Detectives* (1931) stretches out like elastic, and *E.T.* and Elliott soar on a miraculously aerial bicycle, while the more complex dream-language of Tarkovsky's *Mirror* (1974) nonetheless remains firmly anchored to the psychology of its child protagonist.

This is no dry media studies lecture: Cousins's enthusiasm is infectious, his language always accessible and sometimes demotic. When the little girl in Mohammad-Ali Talebi's *The Boot* (1992) discovers the loss of the item in question, Cousins predicts that "she'll go mental", while "strop" as both noun and verb captures the peculiar qualities of childhood anger (another sub-section, with Iranian films featuring heavily). The girl in Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth* (1984) has just heard about liberation and communism, "a storm as fierce as puberty". The adult world

can be distant (the motif of adult heads cut off by the frame is explored by a Ben and Laura video and a Tom and Jerry cartoon), shockingly intrusive, or pointedly absent. Somai Shinji's *Moving* (1993) and Koreeda Hirokazu's *I Wish* (2011) both tackle missing parents, while an exploration of a structurally unsound building in J. Lee Thompson's *The Yellow Balloon* (1953) ends in tragedy. Bullying is also touched on, not necessarily within the same peer group: the victim in Idrissa Ouedraogo's *Yaaba* (1989) is the elderly woman of the title, while Cousins describes Valerie Hobson's *Estella* in David Lean's *Great Expectations* (1946) as "an Edward Scissorhands of cutting class comments".

It's easy to quibble about omissions of countries and themes, but Cousins isn't pretending that his film is anything other than a deeply personal skimming of an endlessly fertile topic. Appropriately, before declaring solidarity with Jafar Panahi (whose *The White Balloon* is one of the great recent movies about childhood), the end credits pay tribute to all the featured children, since the film is more about them than it is about the adults who gave them immortality. S

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Mary Bell
Adam Dawtry

Written by

Mark Cousins

Editor

Tim Langer

Dubbing Mixer

Ali Murray

©The British Film Institute/BofA Productions

Production Companies

Made with the support of the BFI's Film Fund

A BofA production for the BFI in association with Channel 4

Film Extracts

Huang tudì/Yellow Earth (1984)

E.T. The Extra-terrestrial

Kaze no naka no kodomo/Children in the Wind (1937)

An Angel at My Table

Ghatashraddha/The Ritual (1977)

Katok i skripka/The Steamroller and the Violin

(1960)

S.E.R. Svoboda

eto rai/Freedom is

Paradise

(1989)

Los olvidados

(1950)

Great Expectations

(1946)

Toko no yado/An Inn in Tokyo

(1935)

Chakmeh/The Boot

(1992)

Badkonake sefid/The White Balloon

(1995)

Fanny och Alexander/Fanny and Alexander

(1982)

Curly Top

(1935)

Meet Me in St. Louis

(1944)

Louis

(1944)

Moonrise Kingdom

(2012)

Ghatashraddha/The Ritual

(1977)

Tomka die shoket e tij/Tomka and His Friends

(1977)

The First Movie

(2009)

La petite vendueuse de soleil/The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun

(1999)

The Night of the Hunter

(1955)

Hugo och Josefín/Hugo and Josephine

(1967)

Wrony/Crows

(1994)

Kauwboy

(2012)

Kes

(1969)

Moving

(1993)

Dare mo shiranai/

Nobody Knows

(2003)

Yaaba/Grandmother

(1989)

A Mouse in the House

(1947)

Gasman

(1997)

At zjive republika!/

Long Live the Republic

(1965)

Par desmit minutem vecaks/Ten Minutes

Older

El espíritu de la colmena/The Spirit of the Beehive

(1973)

Frankenstein

(1931)

Bid-o-Bad/Willow and Wind

(2000)

Nespatrené/The

Unseen

(1996)

Big Business

(1929)

Zéro de conduite

(1933)

Do Rah-e hal Baray-e yek Masaleh/Two Solutions for One Problem

(1975)

Alyonka

(1962)

Finlandia

(1922)

Les Quatre cents coups/The 400 Blows

(1959)

Maeurnui gohyang/A Hometown in Heart

(1949)

Palle alene i verden/Palle Alone in the World

(1949)

Kiseki I Wish

(2011)

My Childhood

(1972)

Le Ballon rouge/The Red Balloon

(1956)

The Yellow

Balloon

(1953)

Melodiya diya sharmanki/

Melody for a Street Organ

The Kid

(1921)

Emil und die Detektive/Emil and the Detectives

(1931)

Qyteti më i rinë botë/

The Newest City in the World

(1974)

Zerkalo/Mirror

(1974)

In Colour

[178:1]

Part-subtitled

Distributor

Dogwoof

9,502 ft +8 frames

Filmmaker and critic Mark Cousins uses camcorder footage of his young relatives Ben and Laura and a solo trip to the Isle of Skye as inspiration for exploring aspects of childhood on film. Clips from 53 films illustrate such subjects as shyness and wariness, class difference, arguments, conscious and unconscious

performance, storytelling, glimpses of the adult world, the urge to destroy, adventure, loneliness and isolation, the loss of one or both parents, dreaming and dressing up. Cousins concludes that no other artform has examined children in such detail, thanks to the moving image's unique ability to capture the moment.

Suzanne

France/Belgium 2013
Director: Katell Quillévéré
Certificate 12A 94m 17s

Reviewed by Ginette Vincendeau

Suzanne is the second feature from the 34-year-old Katell Quillévéré, already celebrated for her first film, *Love Like Poison* (2010), which was awarded the Prix Jean Vigo. Similarly, *Suzanne* was selected as the opening film for the prestigious Critics' Week at Cannes in 2013 and at the time of going to press had been nominated to pick up five Césars in the 2014 ceremony. Such enthusiasm for the young woman director is understandable. While everyone admired the freshness and originality of *Love Like Poison*, her new film succeeds in combining the intimate light touch and romanticism of a certain kind of French auteur cinema with a sharper social vision, at the same time boasting stunning performances by the actors in the four central roles, all of whom are part of the César nominations: Sara Forestier as Suzanne, Adèle Haenel as her sister Maria, François Damiens as their father Nicolas and Paul Hamy as Julien, Suzanne's lover.

Suzanne is part family saga, part romantic tragedy and part social drama. We follow the life of the eponymous heroine from when she is a little girl in the late 1980s to the present, 25 odd years later, and her intensely close relationship with her father and younger sister. Regular visits to the cemetery to put flowers on the girls' mother's grave signal the latter's untimely death and the significance of her absence at the heart of the family. The working-class milieu is economically but clearly delineated by the father's occupation (lorry driver), the girls' abbreviated schooling and then their chaotic working trajectory, and also by the decor. This is, refreshingly, a French film where the characters' personal angst is not played out against vast Parisian apartments or Provençal homes with swimming pools. Although *Suzanne* is set in the south of France, the rundown industrial landscape around Nicolas's workplace and the cramped interiors are far from the picturesque views we are used to seeing of this region.

Suzanne's name chimes with the lyrics of the Leonard Cohen song we hear interpreted by Nina Simone over the end credits, but she also recalls another Suzanne, the heroine of Maurice Pialat's 1983 film *A nos amours*. This is possibly no accident, as Pialat is the undisputed master of raw realism and stories of destructive sexual desire within working-class environments (as in, for instance, another of his films, 1980's *Loulou*). *Suzanne* recalls Pialat also in its idiosyncratic storytelling, which combines elongated sequences with abrupt ellipses. So while Quillévéré's film covers more than two decades of its heroine's life, it is no traditional saga but rather a succession of significant moments in Suzanne's life, with large gaps in between. For example, we suddenly learn that the adolescent Suzanne is pregnant, without any knowledge of the affair or encounter that led to it, then we see her briefly pregnant, and then jump to the time when her son Charlie is aged four or five. Remarkably, too, the director chooses to leave off screen an entire criminal subplot. As a young mother Suzanne falls in love with Julien, an attractive petty criminal. She follows him, in the process abandoning her son to her father and her sister. Two years elapse and we find her in court, taking the rap for crimes



Une femme et une femme: Sara Forestier, Adèle Haenel

committed with Julien, who has vanished, but see nothing of their life together or their criminal activities (burglary and extortion), which are instead flatly recounted by the judge in court.

Suzanne, also like *A nos amours*, offers a fascinating portrait of a young woman caught between her sexual passion, her desire for independence and social reality. The director's elliptical method works wonders in scenes that could otherwise become ploddingly sociological, such as Suzanne's visit to Charlie in his foster family several years on; the sober way in which his estrangement from her is evoked makes it all the more poignant. Similarly Suzanne's attempted suicide, after Julien fails to materialise when she comes out of jail, is treated in a style that is both oblique and lyrical, as is

the pair's second chance meeting on a bus.

There are times, though, when one would like to know more about Suzanne as a social being. The film observes her as a daughter, a sister, a lover and a mother, a tragic figure marked by separation and loss (including that of her sister) but fails to construct her own point of view. For most of the time she is a curious mixture of courage and submissiveness, consumed by her passion for Julien. If she appears ultimately fulfilled by motherhood, the Cohen song celebrates a mysterious, alluring yet crazy Madonna figure. But, like Nina Simone's rendition of the song, *Suzanne* remains a haunting portrayal of its heroine, and a remarkably assured second film that confirms Quillévéré's potential as a talented young director. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Bruno Levy
Screenplay/Dialogue
Katell Quillévéré
Mariette Désert
Director of Photography
Tom Harari
Editor
Thomas Marchand
Art Director
Anna Falguères
Original Music
Verity Susan
Sound Recordist
Yolande Decarsin
Costumes
Moira Douquet
©[none given]

Production Companies
A Move Movie, Mars
Films co-production in association with Imagine, Panache Productions, La Compagnie

Cinématographique
With the participation of Canal+, Ciné+, Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée
With the support of Région Languedoc-Roussillon in partnership with CNC and Région Provence-Alpes Côte d'Azur in partnership with CNC
In association with Cofinova 8, Banque Postale Image 5, Manon 2

CAST

Sara Forestier
Suzanne
François Damiens
Nicolas
Adèle Haenel
Maria
Paul Hamy
Julien
Lola Dueñas

Irène
Corinne Masiero
Elaine
Anne Le Ny
Mme Danvers
Karim Leklou
Vince
Apollonia Luisetti
young Suzanne
Fanie Zanini
young Maria

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

8,485 ft +8 frames

The south of France, the late 1980s to the present.
Suzanne and her younger sister Maria live with their father Nicolas, a lorry driver (their mother died young). The film follows the family over a period of about 25 years, during which we witness the sisters' closeness and see how Suzanne's actions affect all around her. Suzanne becomes pregnant while still at school and decides to keep the child, against Nicolas's wishes, giving birth to a son, Charlie. She falls in love with Julien, a petty delinquent, and leaves Charlie with Maria and Nicolas in order to be with him. We learn that she has disappeared for over a year, and find her in jail. She is tried for burglaries and violence perpetrated with Julien, though he has fled. When she comes out of jail and finds that Julien isn't there, she tries to commit suicide. Meanwhile Charlie has been placed in a foster family and has begun to forget her. She finds a job as a waitress. She encounters Julien again and they rekindle their affair. He is now involved in drug smuggling from Morocco; she accompanies him there on a false passport. She gives birth to a baby girl. Later, when she finds that Maria died in a car accident, she gives herself up to the police. The film ends with her father and her son, now an adolescent, visiting her and her baby in jail.

Svengali

United Kingdom 2013
Director: John Hardwick
Certificate 15 92m 34s

Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

See
Development
Tale on
page 14

Svengali is primarily a feature-length vehicle for its writer/producer/star Jonny Owen, who reprises a character – gormless but loveable Welsh rock 'n' roll fanatic Dixie – first glimpsed in a series of popular YouTube webisodes.

No spring chicken and permanently clad in a fishtail parka that's seen better days, Dixie is a man painfully out of step with the times. This is signalled from the outset by a nifty animated credits sequence built from stacks of virtually obsolete C-90 cassettes, Dixie's listening format of choice (it's likely that he wouldn't have heard of mp3s, although he's later seen scouring YouTube for potential band signings). A long-nursed dream of becoming a band manager and emulating the careers of idols such as Malcolm McLaren, Brian Epstein and Andrew Loog Oldham finally leads him to forsake the valleys for London, hoping while he's there to discover the next big thing. In tow is beloved girlfriend Shell (Vicky McClure), who's patient and supportive but decidedly more alert to the tough financial toll of making Dixie's dream anything close to a reality.

Owen cuts an amiable presence as this dim-witted but essentially decent fish out of water. Completely without guile and forever carrying around supermarket carrier bags, he flounders in a cynical music biz that seems populated exclusively by cartoon phonies, among them Matt Berry's South African-accented, Bermuda-shorts-sporting label mogul and Roger Evans's venal, backstabbing A&R man. As a foil for Dixie, McClure is typically strong, although the film doesn't seem to know what to do with her character once things take off for the budding impresario. The band that Dixie attaches himself to, hellraising young four-piece The Premature Congratulations, appears to be vaguely modelled on The Libertines – a resemblance furthered by cameos from the latter's Carl Barât and former manager Alan McGee, both playing themselves. Amusingly, it's McGee who gives Dixie the lifeline he needs after being charmed by the rookie's retro dependence on cassettes. As for the band, it's a little hard to swallow, even in the film's satiric world, that they would be the toast

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Jonny Owen

Martin Root

Written by

Jonny Owen

Based on an

original concept

by Jonny Owen,

Dean Cavanagh

Director of

Photography

Catherine Derry

Edited by

Ant 'Pants' Boys

Kant Pan

Production Designer

Carline Steiner

Original Music Score

Tristan Norwell

Re-recording Mixer

Markus Mull

Costume Designer

Julie Jones

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Production

Companies

Root Films presents

Executive Producers

Mark Pritchard

Henry Normal

CAST

Jonny Owen

Dixie

Vicky McClure

Michelle, 'Shell'

Roger Evans

Horsey

Martin Freeman

Don

Maxine Peake

Angie

Michael Socha

Tommy

Dylan Edwards

Jake

Joel Fry

Macca

Curtis Lee

Thompson

Scott

Brian Hibbard

Dixie's dad

Sharon Morgan

Dixie's mum

Morwenna Banks

Francine Hardy

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Distributor

Munro Film Services

8,331 ft +0 frames

UK, present day. Welsh postman Dixie moves to London with his girlfriend Shell, hoping to realise his dream of managing a rock band. A volatile young four-piece, The Premature Congratulations, take Dixie on, but he has to borrow from loan sharks to fund their progress. Dixie gives a demo tape to boyhood friend Horsey, now a record-label executive. The band's first gig turns into a riot when they fight on stage, but the resulting buzz makes them a hot media property. Horsey's boss urges him to sign the band – without Dixie's involvement. Shell leaves Dixie after finding out about his debts and wrongly suspecting him of having an affair. Band member Jake quits just as another record label offers Dixie a lucrative album deal. Dixie races to Scotland to find Jake and persuades him to return, but he's detained for fare-dodging on the way back. When he finally returns to London, Dixie finds the reunited band members have already signed for Horsey. Dixie withdraws and reconciles with Shell.



Rock dreams: Jonny Owen

of London after one aborted gig turns into a riot (we never really get to hear any of their music).

Music-video veteran John Hardwick directs at a brisk pace at first, even as the sketchy material very clearly betrays its episodic, short-form origins. But eventually the structure begins to sag and the tone wobbles uneasily between broadly comic and overtly sentimental. Later, as multiple catastrophes and disappointments pile up around Dixie, he becomes less of a comical fall guy and more of a tragic Job figure – the breeziness of the early sections is all but stilled. The film's skits – and its various cameo appearances – tend to be hit-and-miss: Martin Freeman is good value as an irascible vintage record-shop proprietor who clashes with Dixie over their respective mod credentials, but Katy Brand as a grotesque Eastern European landlady falls flat.

Like its warm, goofy protagonist, *Svengali* wears its heart on its sleeve and is ultimately hard to dislike, yet this is one occasion where the singles are more effective than the album that follows. S

Tinker Bell and the Pirate Fairy

USA 2014, Director: Peggy Holmes
Certificate U 77m 58s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Disney Toon Studio's sturdy, handsomely mounted fairy franchise drops its trademark eco-themes for this fifth drama in favour of a girlish, age-appropriate action romp pitting the Pixie Hollow fairies against the still-young pirates of *Peter Pan*.

In an ill-judged bid to freshen the set-up, Tinker Bell's habitual role as the inquisitive fairy innovator is given to Christina Hendricks's feisty, rule-breaking Zarina, effectively reducing the eponymous heroine to ensemble status. While this fits with the film's paean to collaborative friendships, the viewer isn't always sure whether to root for Tink's rescue mission or Zarina's bid for freedom. Tom Hiddleston's courtly but conniving cabin boy, eventually unmasked as a young Captain Hook ("You're no match for an Eton education such as mine"), is a compensatory pleasure, however.

Despite the franchise's commitment to high-quality visuals and voice work (it retains the services of Anjelica Huston's purring Queen Clarion for the briefest snatches of dialogue), its friends-forever, nature-loving message feels tediously worn. Reduced to gimmicks such as letting TV's *Project Runway* winner Christian Siriano design Zarina's rakish lady-pirate costume (it looks more barroom 'shot girl' than buccaneer, uncomfortably), the format seems to be running short of pixie dust. S



A handful of pixie dust: *Tinker Bell*

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Jenni Magee-Cook

Music

Joel McNeely

Sound Designer

Todd Toon

©[TBC]

Production

Company

Disney Toon Studios

Executive Producer

John Lasseter

Voice Cast

Mae Whitman

Tinker Bell

Christina Hendricks

Zarina

Tom Hiddleston

James, cabin boy

Lucy Hale

Periwinkle

Lucy Liu

Silvermist

Debby Ryan

Spike

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[1.78:1]

Distributor

Buena Vista

International (UK)

7,017 ft +0 frames

US home

viewing title

The Pirate Fairy

Neverland, around 1904. Inquisitive fairy-turned-pirate Zarina returns from banishment to steal the blue pixie dust that controls Pixie Hollow. When Tinker Bell and her friends try to retrieve it, she switches their fairy talents. The fairies chase Zarina and her human pirate crew and battle to stop them using the dust to make an invincible flying ship. Young James Hook imprisons Zarina after tricking her into transforming his vessel. The fairies rescue Zarina and use their new talents to rout the pirates and dump them at sea. A repentant Zarina returns to Pixie Hollow.

Tom at the Farm

France/Canada 2013
Director: Xavier Dolan

Reviewed by Calum Marsh

Xavier Dolan would doubtless cringe to hear it but the precocious Québécois filmmaker's fourth feature, *Tom at the Farm*, bears all the signs of self-conscious reinvention. Severe where his former films were lush, slender where they were elephantine, generic where the others defied convention, *Tom* seems in many ways an exercise in restraint – a suppression of Dolan's trademark grandeur as if only to prove that it can be done. Last year's *Laurence Anyways*, Dolan's three-hour, multi-decade saga of transgender romance, may have at last persuaded the sceptical of the young auteur's ambition and virtuosity, but it also established an upper limit to his aspirations: its scope could hardly be replicated, let alone expanded upon, without a commensurate risk of disaster. By his 24th birthday Dolan had exhausted the possibilities of big. So for his follow-up, naturally, he decided to think small.

To that end, *Tom at the Farm* finds him thoughtfully receding from the flamboyance that defined his earlier work, scaling back not only conceptually (derived from a play by Michel Marc Bouchard, the action is confined almost exclusively to one household and the conflict seizing its three temporary inhabitants) but also tonally, thematically, visually and even musically. In fact, the film's soundtrack provides the clearest counterpoint to Dolan's usual tendencies: forgoing the pop-jukebox sensibility for which he remains best known in favour of a sombre original score (composed, in Bernard Herrmann fashion, by Oscar-winning Frenchman Gabriel Yared), *Tom at the Farm* seems intent from the outset on shearing itself of its director's recognisable tics and habits – beginning with his love of popular music, in which his first three films were slathered. Apart from a Rufus Wainwright track over the end credits, only a single pop song survives *Tom's* final cut: Corey Hart's soft-rock hit 'Sunglasses at Night', piped in diegetically during the climax. And central to its effect is the fact that it's the only one.

Dolan's new-found less-is-more attitude to form yields considerable pleasures. For one thing the lack of formal embellishment frees the film to emphasise character and theme rather than the merely cosmetic, and it offers Dolan, the perennial high-stylist, an opportunity to play up his less obvious strengths as dramatist (and actor: he plays the eponymous lead). These are roles to which Dolan proves surprisingly well suited. The story, as befits its origins in the theatre, is exceptionally simple but elegantly told. Dolan's Tom, a queer Montrealer, travels to the rural farmland owned by the family of his lover Guillaume, who has recently passed away. Arriving in town for the funeral, Tom discovers that Guillaume's mother Agathe (Lise Roy) is aware of neither her late son's sexuality nor the nature of Tom's relationship with him, and in fact seems under the impression that a non-existent girlfriend is mourning for him in Montreal. It quickly transpires that this illusion has been carefully cultivated and maintained by Francis (Pierre-Yves Cardinal), Guillaume's violently homophobic (and implicitly closeted) brother, who now plans to bully Tom into remaining on the farm and



Secrets and lies: Xavier Dolan

acting as a kind of fraternal substitute.

Not much actually proceeds from this slender premise. Not much needs to. Dolan is less interested in this story than in the emotional and psychological implications it entrains – and it is here that he has found richness. Dolan understands that the most effective thrillers are those governed not by machinations of plot but by a deference to feeling; his film is therefore concerned not so much with a physical crisis as with the sense of suffocation it engenders. What you begin to realise while watching *Tom at the Farm* is that its restraint is

more than simply an exercise, its suppressions more than the tests of a director with no other recourse. *Tom at the Farm* is a film of self-restraint because it's a film about self-restraint — about the ways we permit ourselves to be bound. This is an impressive feat. In one sense Dolan has crafted a simple, streamlined thriller in the Hitchcock mould, an effective genre film whose style reflects convention. But in another sense he's achieved something more: he's radically shifted his approach to filmmaking, reinventing himself in order to make a movie about a man forced to self-reinvent. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Nathanaël Karmitz
Charles Gillbert

Xavier Dolan

Screenplay/

Dialogue

Xavier Dolan

Michel Marc

Bouchard

Based on the play

Tom à la ferme

by Michel Marc

Bouchard

Director of

Photography

André Turpin

Editor

Xavier Dolan

Art Director

Colombe Raby

Original Music

Gabriel Yared

Sound Design/

Supervision

Sylvain Brassard

Costume Design

Xavier Dolan

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France Cinéma

Production

Companies

MK2 presents

A Sons of Manual

production in association with ARTE France Cinéma, Arte/Cofinova 9

In collaboration with Super Écran, Radio-Canada

Produced by Sons of Manual and MK2

Executive Producers

Nancy Grant

Xavier Dolan

CAST

Xavier Dolan
Tom

Pierre-Yves Cardinal

Francis

Lise Roy

Agathe

Evelyne Brochu

Sarah

Manuel Tedros

bar owner

Jacques Lavallée

priest

Anne Caron

doctor

Oliver Morin

Paul

In Colour

Subtitles

Distributor

Network Releasing

French theatrical title
Tom à la ferme

Rural Quebec, present day. Tom arrives at a farm belonging to the family of his recently deceased lover Guillaume. Meeting Guillaume's elderly mother Agathe, Tom realises that she does not know the nature of his relationship with her son, referring to the two of them as friends and enquiring about Guillaume's (non-existent) girlfriend. Late that night, Tom is violently woken by Guillaume's brawny older brother Francis, who threatens Tom and demands that he keep his brother's sexuality a secret from Agathe. The following morning the three attend Guillaume's funeral. Tom upsets Agathe after he decides against delivering a revealing eulogy and, as a result, is beaten by Francis in the bathroom. Tom attempts to leave town but, realising that he has left his luggage behind, reluctantly returns to the farm. The following day he finds that his car has been stripped of its tyres by Francis, who intends to keep Tom around for company. Desperate, Tom calls Sarah, who arrives and pretends to be Guillaume's girlfriend. Francis, suspecting that this is a rescue attempt, quickly arranges to send her home by bus. Tom visits a local bar and learns that Francis, some years earlier, horrifically mutilated a gay patron. Tom makes an escape the next morning on foot. Francis catches up with him in his SUV and chases him through the woods, but Tom manages to sneak away and steal the vehicle. Later, stopping at a petrol station, Tom meets Francis's former victim.

Under the Skin

United Kingdom/USA/Switzerland 2013

Director: Jonathan Glazer

Certificate 15 107m 59s

See Feature
on page 22

Reviewed by Sam Wigley

People who saw *Birth* (2004), and saw beyond a surface farfetchedness to its sublime undertow of feeling, knew to be excited about the next

Jonathan Glazer movie. The wait ends, nearly a decade later, with another birth of sorts: a Kubrickian pre-title sequence that begins with a pinprick of light in the middle of darkness, then stellar dazzle, circular eclipses – and finally the warm-hued iris of an eyeball.

Then we're suddenly rushing through depth and lights as if entering 2001's Star Gate, but the lights begin to look like those of passing cars and we realise we're with a biker speeding along one of planet Earth's motorways. Michel Faber's 2000 source novel delayed revealing its enigmatic protagonist's extraterrestrial origins but – with the secret already out in the ether – this otherworldly opening makes it apparent from the start. Besides, what else but her perspective of total otherness could explain why the urban Scotland of shopping centres, nightclubs and car parks appears here, even to us, so foreign and incomputable?

This unnamed predator (called Isserley in the book and played with glassy allure by Scarlett Johansson) is not a naïf like the alien visitors in *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976) or John Carpenter's wonderful, underrated *Starman* (1984), whose first small steps for alienkind are defined by childlike wonder and befuddlement. *Under the Skin*'s 'heroine' knows how to drive a car and turn a sentence, and seems to intuit the potency of red lipstick as she kerb-crawls the Scottish city picking up men to lure to strange inky fates in vast black rooms.

From her driving seat, we see a gritty, social-realist Britain: familiar high-street shops, ordinary faces, shabby roadsides. The first section of Glazer's film plays like an oneiric northern-climes recasting of Abbas Kiarostami's *10* (2002), in which an Iranian woman driver's conversations with successive passengers cumulatively take the temperature of a nation. The chipper lad, the cocksure charmer, the deformed lonely-heart – in *Under the Skin*, each takes his turn in the passenger seat, entranced by this shock of Scarlett in Glasgow, beguiled by her ingratiating smile. Her tender flirtation flatters one after the other, so that longing clouds their ability to spot a praying mantis about to strike.

Nothing in our kitchen-sink tradition prepares us for the formidable scenes in which these unwitting passers-by follow the alien femme fatale into her lair, feeling the siren's pull as they shed their clothes bit by bit in a Tardis-like cavern of endless blackness. Astonishing music by Micachu's Mica Levi – ominous death drums and shrieking strings – scores these abstracted dances of erotic doom, as the victims obliviously wade into lethal, liquid depths like insects succumbing to the final stickiness of a Venus fly trap while happily drunk on the sweet scent.

In the novel, these killings are carried out as a kind of interplanetary meat farming; here, Glazer and co-screenwriter Walter Campbell strip away explanation, keeping the victims' exact fates obscure. We feel only the chill of the killer's remorselessness. It's a hostile vantage



The woman who fell to Earth: Scarlett Johansson

point from which to view the mill and throng of contemporary Glasgow, and the narrow gaze of *Under the Skin* is tainted with cynicism, even disgust. Men are defined by their concupiscence; good Samaritans are motivated by self-interest; even the wilderness, where the film escapes for its final act, conceals depravity. While *Gravity* (2013) was a hymn to human endeavour and resilience, *Under the Skin* feels as cold and hard as onyx.

Yet for all its clinical detachment, Glazer's film becomes its own oblique treatise on what it means to be and feel human. The alien seductress's encounter with the disfigured man presents her with a peer into an abyss of loneliness, triggering confusing feelings of

empathy and mercy that send her into a tailspin. Here, for the first time, there is the glimmer of a ghost in the machine: Johansson's performance remains opaque, all but unreadable, but we sense (or is it only wishful projection?) the awakening of a consciousness – a realisation that people are more than the skin they're in.

Despite the schematism of this communion between Beauty and 'Beast', the savage final scenes in the Scottish Highlands offer no sentimental hosannas; Glazer retains his austere rigour to the finish. With an ending that's as matter-of-fact as it is mysterious and provocative, *Under the Skin* confirms him – three terrific films down – as one of Britain's most exciting filmmakers. S

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

James Wilson
Nick Wechsler

Written by

Walter Campbell
Jonathan Glazer
Based on the novel

Director of Photography

Daniel Landin
Editor

Paul Watts

Production Designer

Chris Oddy

Music Composed by

Mica Levi

Production Sound Mixer

Nigel Albermarle

Costume Designer

Steven Noble

©Seventh Kingdom

Productions

Limited, Channel

Four Television

Corporation and

British Film Institute

Production Companies

Film4 and BFI present

in association
with Silver Reel,
Creative Scotland and
FirmNation
Entertainment a
Nick Wechsler/JW
Films production

A Jonathan
Glazer film

Developed with the

assistance of Film4

Supported by the

National Lottery

through Creative

Scotland

A co-production

with Sigma Films

Made with the

support of the

BFI Film Fund

Executive Producers

Tessa Ross

Reno Antoniades

Walter Campbell

Claudia Blumhuber

Ian Hutchinson

Florian Dargel

CAST

Scarlett Johansson

Laura

Jeremy McWilliams
Lynsey Taylor
Mackay
Dougie McConnell
Kevin McLinden
D Meade
Andrew Gorman
Joe Szula
Krystof Hadek
Roy Armstrong
Alison Chand
Ben Mills

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Distributor

StudioCanal Limited

9,718 ft +8 frames

Glasgow, the present. A motorcyclist retrieves a female body from a ditch, taking it into a van with an otherworldly interior, where its clothes are given to an unnamed woman. In her new attire, the woman (later more explicitly revealed as an alien) drives around the city picking up a succession of men. Her seduction ends with the men going back to a house, where they are killed wandering into quicksand-like black liquid. Failing to seduce a swimmer at the beach, she bashes his head in with a rock.

Enticing a disfigured man into her van, she talks to him about his loneliness. He too is lured to her lair, but is spared, though he is later tracked down by the alien's motorcyclist accomplice. Apparently unsettled by this encounter, the woman travels out into the countryside. Her trance-like daze attracts the attention of a man on the bus, who offers her shelter. Shocked by the act of sex with the man, she leaves.

In a forest, a logger strikes up a conversation with her. Later, he molests her while she's asleep in a bothy. She flees but he pursues her through the trees. Catching up with her, he attempts to rape her but is disconcerted when her skin breaks to reveal that she's not human. After he runs away, she peels off her human flesh to reveal an alien body beneath. The logger returns and sets fire to the alien. It burns to nothing as snow begins to fall.

Unforgiven

Japan 2013
Director: Sang-il Lee
Certificate 15 135m 29s

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

Just when it seemed that *American Hustle* had set the bar for shameless over-reliance on music to structure and flavour its plot, along comes Lee Sang-il's Japanese remake of Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* to show that there's still limitless scope for musical crimes against cinema. David O. Russell depends on an entire hit-parade of vintage pop to give his film its oomph, but Lee drowns his film in a virtually non-stop score by Iwashima Taro which overstates every landscape shot and every turn of emotion. It's as if Lee never noticed how well the Lennie Niehaus score worked in the original film. Sadly, the crassness of the soundtrack is matched by the shallowness of the director's adaptation of the old David Webb Peoples script.

The 'translation' of Eastwood's film into Japanese terms is accomplished with skill and occasional ingenuity, but the adaptation is so close to the original in its plotting and detail that a review is bound to start by noting what little is different. Lee's bounty hunters are former samurai of the shogunate, driven to the northern island of Hokkaido by imperial samurai after the restoration of the emperor in 1868; they have reinvented themselves as farmers in the harsh terrain and formed bonds with the island's aboriginal inhabitants, the Ainu.

The first addition is a prologue set in 1869: the newly arrived fugitives come under attack from imperial samurai in a snowy forest, and Jubei (the Clint Eastwood character) saves the life of Kingo (the Morgan Freeman character), thereby establishing a blood debt. Later, the braggart kid Sawada (the Jaimz Woolvett character) is reinvented as an Ainu passing for Japanese – on the precise model of Kikuchiyo, the peasant trying to pass as a samurai in *Seven Samurai* (Mifune Toshiro's performance there is the equally precise model for Yagira Yuya's here.) That aside, Lee has Kingo (rather than Jubei) initiate the bounty-hunting mission, and has



The wild east: *Unforgiven*

given Jubei a deceased Ainu wife to amplify the film's incidental attack on anti-Ainu racism.

What's lost in translation are all the resonances. Eastwood played the character of Munny as old and weary and brought the full weight of his own career in westerns – and of the genre's history – to the film's sense of valediction. Watanabe Ken, fine actor though he is, brings no such hinterland to the role, and the film is forced to get sentimental about Jubei's family to give the character compensatory motivation. Lee (a third-generation Korean-Japanese, born in 1974) has never made a samurai film before. He made a splash with his nihilistic indie feature *Border Line* (2002), but has spent the last decade as an industry hack, recycling other people's material: *Hula Girls* (2006) is a variation on *The Full Monty*, and he's filmed several popular novels. It was apparently his own idea to remake *Unforgiven* as a samurai western, but no amount of technical skill – or of bombastic music – can disguise the film's fundamental hollowness. It reduces Eastwood's film to the bare bones of its plot. Pointless. Worse, unnecessary. S

Visitors

USA/Canada 2013
Director: Godfrey Reggio
Certificate U 87m 47s

Reviewed by Calum Marsh

The social-issue documentary is a form long beleaguered by pedestrianism – it's the realm of talking heads, needlessly portentous music, recycled news footage and any number of other televisual clichés. The films of Godfrey Reggio, by contrast, take the drabness of the social-issue doc in the opposite direction: formally, if not conceptually, they have more in common with exponents of the avant-garde than with something like *Blackfish* or *Inside Job* (to name but two recent middling examples), forgoing routine conventions in favour of a style more recognisably their own.

His fourth feature, *Visitors*, proves distinctive from the moment it begins. We fade in on the face of a silverback gorilla, a close-up that lasts several uncomfortable minutes. Like all of Reggio's films, this one is entirely wordless; at first the only sound is the quiet throb of orchestral strings, understated but suggestive. Soon we move to human faces – people Reggio filmed surreptitiously with a hidden camera as they watched TV or played games, seen here in stark, monochromatic high-definition. For a while our only impression is of beauty – the mood is contemplative and the atmosphere engrossing. But when the point reveals itself, this illusion is summarily dispelled.

Those familiar with the director's earlier work should hardly be surprised. Reggio's debut film *Koyaanisqatsi* is still his most widely seen and revered, having become in the 30-odd years since its release something of a cult item among budding activists and students of undergraduate philosophy. As a work of experimentation in sound and image, *Koyaanisqatsi* more than earns its reputation as a crossover hit; that its influence can still be felt in everything from advertising to videogames is testament to its pop-cultural endurance. As a work of intellectual substance, on the other hand, *Koyaanisqatsi* remains considerably less impressive – simplistic, sanctimonious and painfully smug.

Beneath the dazzle of its stop-motion photography and undulating Philip Glass score, *Koyaanisqatsi* strives to reprimand its audience for the ills they've inflicted on the world, sneering at everything from food's mass production to the ubiquity of the automobile. Such complaints doubtless seemed shallow enough in 1982 but in 2014 they simply sound embarrassing – and yet Reggio has returned to similar grievances once more. *Visitors* marshals three decades of indignation for another bout of silent, self-righteous wrist-slapping, this latest iteration no less dreary or didactic than the rest. The faces with which we're indulgently greeted soon become objects of unfairly critical scrutiny: Reggio finds in them the zombie-like qualities of a generation rendered braindead by the power of the tube.

The gorilla to whom we were introduced at the beginning of the film makes a return at its dunderheaded conclusion, this time to really stare us down: as *Visitors* ends, the camera pans back from its close-up to reveal a moviegoing audience seated before the animal's judgemental gaze. It's meant to make a point but it plays like a punchline – though one laughable only in its witless simplicity. This is quite typical of the film's

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Kubota Suguru

Takahashi Shinichi

Adaptation

Sang-il Lee

Based on *Unforgiven*

[1992] written by

David Webb Peoples

Cinematography

Kasamatsu Norimichi

Lighting

Watanabe Koichi

Editor

Imai Tsuyoshi

Production Designer

Harada Mitsuo

Music

Iwashiro Taro

Recording

Shiratori Mitsugu

Costume Designer

Ogawa Kumiko

©Warner

Entertainment

Japan Inc.

Production

Companies

A Nikkatsu

Corporation and

Office Shiroku

production

A Warner Bros.

Pictures Japan presentation

CAST

Watanabe Ken

Kamata Jubei, 'Jubei the Killer'

Emoto Akira

Baba Kingo

Yuya Yagira

Sawada Goro

Kutsuna Shioi

Natsume

Koike Eiko

Okaji

Kondo Yoshimasa

Kihachi

Kunimura Jun

Kitaoji Masaharu

Ozawa Yukiyo

Sanosuke

Takitoh Kenichi

Himeji Yasaburo

Miura Takahiro

Hotta Unosuke

Sato Koichi

Oishi Ichizo

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Warner Bros

Distributors (UK)

12,193ft +8 frames

Japanese

theatrical title

Yurusarezarumono

Washiro, Hokkaido, 1880. Two samurai brothers attack a prostitute in a brothel, leaving her face scarred. Older whore Okaji is aghast when police chief Oishi Ichizo proposes a compensatory payment to the brothel-owner as sole punishment for the crime; she and the others put up a bounty to reward anyone who kills Hotta Sanosuke and his brother Unosuke. Soon after, Baba Kingo suggests to his old friend Kamata Jubei that they go after the bounty together; both are former samurai but are now hardscrabble farmers (Jubei is a widower with two small children). They set off for Washiro once Jubei has entrusted his children to his Ainu in-laws. They are soon joined by the excitable young Sawada Goro, an Ainu posing as a Japanese. Veteran swordsman Kitaoji arrives in town with his biographer Himeji, intending to claim the bounty; Oishi thrashes him to deter other bounty hunters but keeps Himeji as his own biographer. Jubei manages to pick off Unosuke with a rifle shot. Kingo opts out, unable to face any more killing, and sets off home – but is intercepted by Oishi's men, tortured and killed. Jubei and Goro stake out the Sendai Clan barracks and Jubei tells Goro to kill Sanosuke while he uses the outhouse toilet. Okaji comes with the bounty, and finds Goro traumatised by the murder. When Jubei hears that Kingo is dead, he tells Goro to take the money to his in-laws. Jubei returns to Washiro and kills Oishi and others in a showdown.

Winter's Tale

Director: Akiva Goldsman
Certificate 12A 117m 52s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

It's impossible to point to a single scene in *Winter's Tale* that epitomises the utter wrongheadedness of the whole endeavour – the movie is nothing but such scenes. A magic-realist fable that follows Colin Farrell's Peter Lake on two NYC-set quests separated by the span of a century, it almost immediately sends your jaw crashing to the ground and doesn't give it a chance to come up again until the credits roll.

Winter's Tale, whose first and longer section is set in the years before America's entry into WWI, plays like the work of someone who has never seen a movie before. Not knowing any better, you might assume that it had been created as the result of some kind of sweepstakes win, or to fulfil the wishes of a sick child. In fact it is based on the 1983 novel *Winter's Tale* by Mark Helprin and was adapted for the screen by Akiva Goldsman, a producer and screenwriter of great repute, making his feature debut with a movie that's a clear frontrunner for 2014's *Cloud Atlas* Award for Messianic Overreaching. Goldsman, who wrote *I Am Legend* and *Cinderella Man*, has secured the services of Will Smith, here for a couple of scenes as Lucifer, and Russell Crowe, playing agent of darkness Pearly Soames, a scarred-up enforcer with the shaggiest Irish accent since Alan Partridge's "Dere's more to Ireland dan dis."

Farrell, as you might expect, fares better with his brogue, though it's hard to say where his character came across it since he was raised in NYC by a Native American foster-father figure who stops in briefly to rap about guardian spirits. Beverly Penn (Jessica Brown Findlay), the ailing rich girl Farrell falls in love with, has both an English accent and fatal consumption, two conditions that her kid sister Willa has managed to avoid. (It falls to Findlay to mouth drippy voiceover nostrums such as, "Inside of each of us is a miracle, and that miracle is meant for one person and one person alone.") Peter will re-encounter Willa a century later, when she is



Bad romance: Jessica Brown Findlay, Colin Farrell

played by Eva Marie-Saint, whose appearance is moving despite the tacit absurdity of her playing a woman who must be 110 years old.

The inexplicable and magical are accepted and commonplace in the city of *Winter's Tale*, a battleground where good and evil meet to duke it out. This is established quite early on when Peter escapes from Pearly's men by virtue of a white Pegasus that just happens to be ambling around the Brooklyn waterfront. We might freely accept all of this if Goldsman had command of his film's tone but he does not, and the late appearance of Jennifer Connelly only serves as a reminder of Sergio Leone's 1984 *Once upon a Time in America*, an epoch-spanning fairytale of New York that handles its temporal transitions with supreme confidence. And while too sweepingly wrongheaded to be the worst movie of the year thus far – that honour should be set aside for a truly spineless mediocrities – *Winter's Tale* is certainly a catawampus mess of rare proportions. ☀



Ready for her close up: *Visitors*

broad-stroke approach. Though its chickly modern veneer distinguishes it, superficially, from its contemporaries, *Visitors* is no more interesting or intelligent than the blandest of social-issue documentaries. Its themes – the impermanence of humankind on a cosmic scale, the bankruptcy of contemporary culture, the hypnotic force of TV and computers and smartphones – are as banal as they are hastily articulated. Reggio may believe he has something valuable to tell us. To judge by his films, we don't need to listen. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Lawrence Taub
Godfrey Reggio
Phoebe Greenberg
Penny Mancuso
Jon Kane
Mara Campione
Cinematography
Trish Goffoni
Graham Berry
Tom Lowe
Editors
Jon Kane
Chris Beseker
Music
Philip Glass

Sound Mix

Martin Czembor
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Production Companies
Steven Soderbergh presents an IRE production in association with opticnerve, Noyes Films and Phi Films
Executive Producers
Dan Noyes

Dean Chenoy

Dolby Digital
In Black and White
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Metrodome Distribution Ltd

7900 ft +8 frames

A black screen. A slow fade reveals a black-and-white close-up of a gorilla's face. We then see the faces of a variety of people as they stare into the camera, their expressions stern and their features largely motionless. A young girl smiles and begins to laugh in slow motion; the faces that follow are seen in various states of expression – confused, surprised and so on. As the montage continues, the reactions become more animated, culminating in a long take in which a group of friends gathered around a couch watching what appears to be a sporting event respond in exaggerated ways. Soon afterwards the faces are replaced with images of dilapidated cityscapes and uninhabited nature: abandoned buildings, closed-down stores, an enormous swamp. The final shot returns to the gorilla, and a slow pan reveals that it is on a movie screen in front of an audience.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Akiva Goldsman
Marc Platt
Michael Tadross
Tony Allard

Written for the screen by
Akiva Goldsman

Based on the novel

by Mark Helprin

Director of Photography

Caleb Deschanel

Edited by

Wayne Wahrman

Tim Squyres

Production Designer

Naomi Shohan

Music

Hans Zimmer
Rupert Gregson-Williams

Sound Mixer

Michael Barosky

Costumes

Designed by

Michael Kaplan

©[TBC]

Production

Companies

Warner Bros.
Pictures presents in association with Village Roadshow Pictures and RatPac-Dune Entertainment

a Weed Road/Marc Platt production

Executive Producers

James Packer

Steven Mnuchin

Kerry Foster

Bruce Berman

CAST

Colin Farrell
Peter Lake
Jessica Brown Findlay
Beverly Penn
Jennifer Connelly
Virginia Gamely
William Hurt
Isaac Penn
Eva Marie Saint
Willa
Graham Greene
Humpstone John

Russell Crowe

Pearly Soames
Will Smith
Lucifer

Dolby Digital/
Datasat/SDDS
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor

Warner Bros.
Distributors (UK)

10,608 ft +0 frames

New York City, 1895. Two immigrants, turned away at Ellis Island, lower their infant child into the harbour as their ship returns home. The child grows up to be thief Peter Lake. Peter is in trouble with his former boss, Pearly Soames, and only escapes from Pearly and his men with the assistance of a magical flying horse. Breaking into the home of the wealthy Penn family, Peter meets Beverly, the tubercular eldest daughter, and the two form an attachment. They flee upstate, pursued by Pearly's thugs. At her family's country home, Peter and Beverly become lovers, but one of Pearly's men succeeds in fatally poisoning her. Pearly – who is an immortal demon and a servant of Lucifer – throws the despondent Peter off the Brooklyn Bridge.

A century later, Peter emerges from the East River an amnesiac. He meets Virginia Gamely and her daughter, who is being treated for cancer. Virginia leads Peter to Beverly's younger sister, who is still alive and who remembers him. This attracts the attention of Pearly, who takes his men to ambush Peter, Virginia and her daughter. The flying horse reappears and spirits them away upstate but Pearly follows. In a confrontation on a frozen river, Peter defeats Pearly. Virginia's sick daughter appears to die during the fracas but Peter brings her back to life with the power of his faith.

The Zero Theorem

Luxembourg/USA/United Kingdom/Romania/France 2013
Director: Terry Gilliam
Certificate 15 106m 18s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

If *Brazil* was Terry Gilliam's take on Orwell's *1984*, *The Zero Theorem* is his version of Huxley's *Brave New World*. His future world – seemingly set in London a few years hence, since it still features red double-deckers, heading to 'Tooting Corporate District' – is gaily, even garishly coloured. People prance about in outlandish carnivalesque costumes or cavort at parties; talking adverts promise happiness ("We put the You back in euphoria"); pizza boxes sing a cheery little jingle when opened. In this candy-coloured world Qohen Leth (a disconcertingly hairless Christoph Waltz) is, like Huxley's Bernard Marx, a disaffected misfit: dressed in grim subfusc and lurking like a secular monk in his crumbling disused church, he ventures outside only reluctantly, scurrying across the road and swearing at the bouncing little bubble cars that threaten to run him down.

As in any good dystopia, behind the surface gaiety lurks an all-powerful, all-controlling organisation. And at the heart of the Mancom corporation, Leth's employer, looms the massive, ominous bulk of the Zero Machine, a cross between a supercomputer and a giant multi-hosed vacuum cleaner. Since Leth is, as he's told by his supervisor Joby (David Thewlis, channelling Eric Idle), "the most productive number-cruncher in your unit", he's given the task of resolving the eponymous and elusive Zero Theorem, whose eventual goal is to prove that "everything adds up to nothing". Along the way he's helped, or possibly hindered, by his online analyst Dr Shrink-Rom (Tilda Swinton, zany and Scots-accented), unattainable blonde sex-bomb Bainsley (Mélanie Thierry) and teenage genius geek Bob (Lucas Hedges), who claims to be the son of Mancom's head honcho Management (Matt Damon, affecting chameleon suits) and addresses everybody else as Bob. "It's a waste of brain cells remembering names," he explains.

Other familiar faces turn up in blink-and-you'll-miss-'em mini-cameos: Sanjeev Bhaskar, Peter Stormare and Ben Whishaw play a trio of eccentric medics. (Rumour has it that an unbilled Robin Williams is somewhere in there too, but if so I must have blinked at the wrong moment.) And as ever in Gilliam's cartoonist world, the sight gags come thick and fast. If one misfires, not to worry, there's another one right behind it. One of the talking ads offers salvation through the Church of Batman the Redeemer; another, for a shopping centre, urges people to "Occupy Mall Street"; meanwhile a towering screen of road signs forbids walking, kissing, dancing, drinking, cycling, sleeping, walking a dog and just about every other imaginable activity. Inside Leth's church, where pigeons strut and rats scurry, CCTV cameras monitor his every move, with the largest of them positioned in place of the head of the decapitated Christ; one all-seeing being usurping another.

The screenplay is by Pat Rushin, adapted from his own 1999 short story, which may explain the film's slightly dated, turn-of-the-millennium feel. When Qohen is trying to resolve the Zero Theorem, what we see on his computer screen looks like nothing so much as a game of 3D Tetris, with grey blocks inscribed with mathematical symbols being slotted into gaps in a huge cubist



Hair today, gone tomorrow: Christoph Waltz, Peter Stormare, Ben Whishaw

structure; and at the party thrown by Joby where Qohen is an alienated guest, everybody is dancing to the music of their own iPod. George Fenton's electronic score also contributes to the 90s feel. The overall effect (as with *Brazil*, if less brutally) is that we're being offered a retro version of the future, possibly via an alternative world.

Even so, *The Zero Theorem* feels like the most coherent and fully intended film that Gilliam has succeeded in making for a long time. (It's also, he claims, one of the cheapest, having been shot in Romania in 36 days.) The underlying message is spelt out towards the end by Management, when he tells Qohen: "The saddest aspect of mankind's

need to believe in a god is that it makes this life meaningless." This nails Qohen, who's spent his whole life waiting for a phone call: a repeat of one he once received that affected him with such a sense of power and such a rush of joy that he dropped the receiver and never heard what the caller had to say. Quite how Management's remark relates to his corporation's quest to resolve the Zero Theorem, which if achieved will apparently result in the whole universe being sucked into a black hole, is less evident. But then Gilliam has always set out in his films to ask more questions than he answers. It's a laudable – if occasionally frustrating – ambition. ☀

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Nicolas Chartier
Dean Zanuck

Written by

Pat Rushin

Director of

Photography

Nicola Pescorini

Film Editor

Mick Audsley

Production Designer

David Warren

Music

George Fenton

Sound Designer

Andre Jacquemin

Costume Designer

Carlo Poggioli

Visual Effects

Chimney Pot

Lenscare FX

Bold Turtle

Technicolor

Mediapro Magic

with Zephyr Films,
Mediapro Pictures,
Le Pacte and Wild
Side Films

in association with
Picture Perfect

Corporation and
Film Capital

A Terry Gilliam film

Europe Funds S.A.

Executive Producer

Patrick Newall

Distributor

Sony Pictures
Releasing

9,567ft +0 frames

CAST

Christoph Waltz

Qohen Leth

David Thewlis

Joby

Mélanie Thierry

Bainsley

Lucas Hedges

Bob

Matt Damon

Management

Tilda Swinton

Dr Shrink-Rom

Dolby Digital

Color provided by

Technicolor

Print provided by

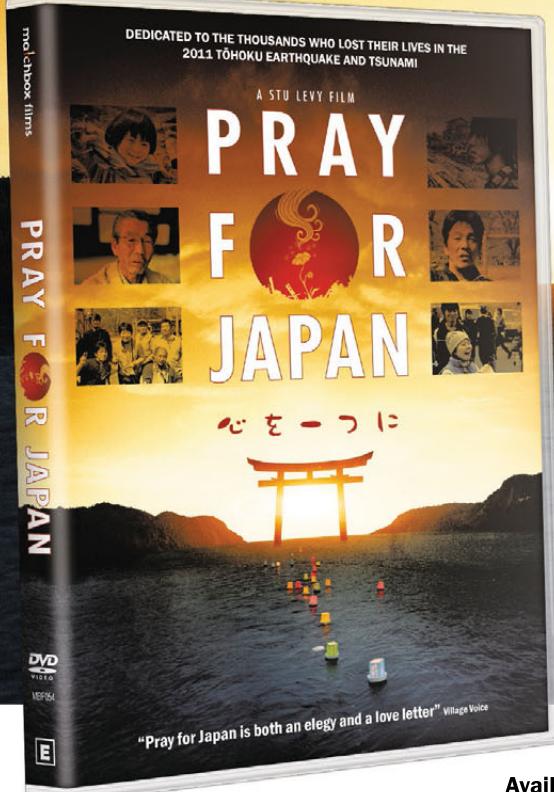
Delux

[2.35:1]

A city of the near future. Qohen Leth lives in a disused church and works as an 'entity-cruncher' for the giant Mancom corporation – a job that largely involves pedalling in a booth. He begs his supervisor Joby to be allowed to work from home, where he hopes to receive an all-important phone call. Reluctantly, he attends Joby's party, where he encounters Management, the head of Mancom, and is saved from choking by Bainsley, an attractive young woman. Joby tells Qohen that he can now work from home and has been chosen to resolve the Zero Theorem. He is shown the huge Zero Machine and meets Bob, a teenager who works on it. Bainsley shows up at Qohen's home in a kinky nurse costume, but keeps him at a distance.

Qohen starts work on the Zero Theorem, occasionally seeking advice from his online analyst Dr Shrink-Rom. Bob, who claims to be Management's son, moves in with him, offering to help. He gives Qohen a virtual-reality suit. Qohen puts it on and finds himself on a virtual Hawaiian beach with Bainsley – but when he starts to make love to her he's thrown out of the illusion. Bob persuades Qohen to come outside with him, but is taken ill. He's removed by two sinister Clones. Joby arrives and berates Qohen for causing him to lose his job.

Realising that solving the Zero Theorem will annihilate everything, Qohen tries to destroy the Machine but it reconstitutes itself and sucks him into a black hole. He awakes on the virtual beach as the sun sets.



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DVD VHS
MPAA Rating: PG-13
E

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“Pray for Japan is both an elegy and a love letter” Village Voice



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Home cinema



Point blank: James Caan as professional safe-cracker Frank in Michael Mann's *Thief*

IT'S A MANN'S MAN'S WORLD

Shot on the tougher fringes of Chicago and drawn from the city's real-life criminal lore, *Thief* is steeped in authenticity

THIEF

Michael Mann; USA 1981; Criterion/Region A Blu-ray and Region 1 DVD Dual Format; 124 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: audio commentary by Michael Mann and James Caan, interviews with Mann, Caan and Johannes Schmoelling of Tangerine Dream, trailer, booklet with essay by Nick James

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

On paper, Michael Mann's feature debut *Thief* is nothing groundbreaking, fit to be consigned to that vague category of 'neo-noir'. Certainly the basic materials of the plot – the hood looking for a last big score before he goes straight – are older than *High Sierra* (1941).

Thief's protagonist Frank (James Caan, 41 years old here) spent his youth in Joliet Prison. He's only been back on the street for a few years but he's already acquired an ex-wife, alimony payments, a car dealership and a bar – all cover for his real money-making career, that of a professional safe-cracker. Despite his unconventional upbringing

and lifestyle, Frank wants the "regular-type life", to quote Mann's *Heat* (1995). Frank's vision of the future is a dream of middle-class normalcy that's literally right out of glossy magazines: he carries around a collage of wife, kids and a big suburban house that he put together back in prison. In a whirlwind courtship that's urgent, over-assertive and utterly sincere, Frank recruits a diner cashier, Jessie (Tuesday Weld), to be his wife. He is ludicrously to-the-point and matter-of-fact. As Caan points out in the commentary track recorded with Mann, he doesn't use one contraction while playing Frank, who says what he means once, clearly, and to be understood.

Largely shot on the streets, alleys and industrial fringes of Mann's hometown Chicago, *Thief* is grounded in authenticity and first-hand know-how – a solid relationship to the physical facts of the world that was then the hallmark of American action films. The dialogue is criminal argot and shop talk, the characters drawn from Chicagoland lore, police blotters and direct experience. Mann conceived of the character of Frank, a man who has spent his formative years as a ward of the state and comes out desperate to make up for lost time, when he was working with Folsom Prison inmates on an earlier

project, the 1979 TV movie *The Jericho Mile*. Real-life Chicago Police Department detective sergeant Chuck Adamson plays one of the plainclothes cops trying to shake Frank down for a cut of his scores, alongside John Santucci, the professional burglar who acted as the film's 'technical adviser'. Santucci later appeared in the Mann-produced television shows *Miami Vice* and the Adamson-created *Crime Story* – although he returned to his first love after the acting gigs dried up. (Another Mann discovery, Dennis Farina, appears as a thug enforcer in *Thief*, though he was still on the force during filming.)

"You couldn't grow up on a farm and play this guy," Mann says of casting Queens-raised Caan as Frank. "You had to have grown up in the city." Caan cribbed his Chicago accent from Mann and learnt how to handle a .45 from a CIA trainer, while Santucci and his crew taught him how to pick locks. The centrepiece heist, which has Frank and his guys using a thermal lance to cut through a wholesale diamond dealer's safe, was filmed at Zoetrope Studios with a documentary-like scrutiny of process, using a real safe and real tools, exactly as it would have been done on-site by a crew. "There were no props on the film," Mann says. "If you picked up a lock

pull, that lock pull had been on scores. Alarm bypasses were alarm bypasses, they'd taken down scores. Half the guns we used had been used."

Thief is 100 per cent legit – but that's only one aspect of the movie. The successful heist is followed immediately by Frank and Jessie cavorting in the Pacific surf as a fade-in of polyphonic synths, provided by the West Berlin-based electronic group Tangerine Dream, builds to a triumphal stride. (In an interview included on the disc, Tangerine Dream's Johannes Schmoelling remembers Mann's close collaboration, effectively 'composing' to the images at the mixer by moving faders up and down.) The side-by-side proximity of these two scenes shows the two poles that, in an uneasy synthesis, make up Mann's style: a hard pragmatism and a rather florid romanticism.

Thief was Tangerine Dream's second movie score, their first having been for William Friedkin's 1977 *Sorcerer*, a film resplendent in apocalyptic masculinity. Like Mann, Friedkin is a native of Chicago, home of Hemingway, City of Broad Shoulders – and one of the main incubators of the conception of American machismo as it was popularly defined in the 20th century. In *Thief*, Mann buys into and perpetuates that Hemingway idea of self-possessed, grimly determined, can-do manhood, with its unbreakable personal codes and sullen pride, but he complicates it as he does so.

In an interview included among the special features, Mann states that his initial instinct was to use Chicago 12-bar blues on the *Thief* soundtrack. But without the contrast between the story's dirt-under-the-nails grit and Tangerine Dream's searing, clean electronic noise, you can't imagine the film having quite the same frisson. In the same interview Mann recalls taking pictures of his hometown as a young man, observing the way the city's bridges and alleyways "presented themselves". This phrasing is key: running counter to Mann's striving towards realism is his presentational idea of the world, a perspective tending towards the theatrical and artificial. *Thief* is an unapologetically composed movie; its Chicago, per Mann, is "a three-dimensional maze of city... there's a lid on it, and the lid is night." The film is marked by moments of strange stillness and serenity, as when Frank contemplates the expanse of Lake Michigan in the early morning light or the night breeze rustling the branches of a tree outside his dream house... right before he burns it all down.

With his documentary impulse and emphasis on capturing process, Mann was in line with the American action film's traditional orientation towards realism, but he welded this to a presentational approach more usually associated with, say, Japanese cinema. In the blue-collar actioner, overt stylisation was regarded as suspect and sissified, something to be consigned to the musical comedy. But those walls had slowly been eroding: Scorsese's enquiries into male pathology, for example, were conducted under the influence of Minnelli and Michael Powell's razzle-dazzle. Along with Japanophile Paul Schrader's *American Gigolo*, released the previous year – and of course



Willie Nelson as Frank's prison mentor Okla

the launch of MTV, to which *Thief*'s appearance was almost exactly contemporary – Mann's film exemplified a sea change in how style was accepted in American popular culture.

In *Thief*, Mann's style appears more or less fully formed – he gravitates to neon like a moth to a flame and revels in complex, multipart crane shots (through the sign in Frank's car dealership, alongside and in front of a Des Moines-bound bus on the freeway). The basic precepts of Mann's personal philosophy are also in place. "I am self-employed," Frank tells the deceptively grandfatherly syndicate boss Leo (Robert Prosky) who tries to hire him. "I am doing fine. I don't deal with egos, I am Joe the boss of my own body. So what the fuck do I have to work for you for?" From here it is a very short hop to Mann's 1992 *Last of the Mohicans* and Daniel Day-Lewis's Leatherstocking rebuffing a British recruiter's question: "You call yourself a patriot, and loyal subject to the crown?" "I don't call myself subject to much at all." All of which is in line with the credo of self-reliance that can be found in much American action

Mann buys into that Hemingway idea of grimly determined manhood, but he complicates it as he does so

filmmaking, from the works of Howard Hawks to those of Mann's fellow Chicagoan Don Siegel, in whose *Charley Varrick* (1973) the protagonist bills himself as 'The Last of the Independents'. And if the bad press surrounding the release of Mann's most recent films – 2006's *Miami Vice* and 2009's *Public Enemies* – is to be taken as any indication, this isn't just posturing. Caan describes Mann, with his 18-hour shooting days, as a "workaholic" and "a loon", and the number of people pulling for the director to fail with each new project suggests that he's made his share of enemies. "There's ways of doing things that round off the corners," says Adamson's detective after laying into Frank in an interrogation room, sounding like nothing so much as a pleading producer.

Earlier I mentioned the "uneasy synthesis" at the centre of Mann's style, between pragmatism and romanticism (which just happen to be the two major strains of Native American philosophy). This volatile mixture isn't a weakness but rather a natural outgrowth of Mann's subject matter, a tension reflected within the films. Time and again Mann deals with the incompatibility of balancing professional dedication and affairs of the heart. Attachments of any kind, as irresistible as they may be, are also a liability, something that can be used as leverage against you. At the close of *Thief*, we see Frank destroy every asset that he has, both emotional and financial. He is enacting the formula for survival that is memorably outlined in *Heat*: "Don't let yourself get attached to anything you are not willing to walk out on in 30 seconds flat if you feel the heat around the corner."

Mann shares this monastic prescription for survival with his contemporary Walter Hill, but where Hill maintains a cool, stoic surface marked by quiet ruefulness, Mann's films erupt with passion and pulsating longing. The final eruption in *Thief*, however, is purely retributive, a scorched-earth settling of scores that ends with the last of those crane-shot flourishes. It's the last word on a first film that announces clearly, and to be understood: "I am not here to play around." ☀



Frank at work: the film takes a documentary-like approach to its protagonists' methods

New releases

THE BIG MELT

Martin Wallace/Jarvis Cocker; UK 2013; BFI/Region-free DVD; Certificate PG; 70 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: live performance and rehearsal footage, interviews with Jarvis Cocker and Martin Wallace, trailer, booklet

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Just as *The Miners' Hymns* (Bill Morrison/Jóhann Jóhannsson) and *From the Sea to the Land Beyond* (Penny Woolcock/British Sea Power) paid tribute to Britain's mining heritage and coastline, so *The Big Melt* draws on archive footage of the steel industry in general and Sheffield in particular, reshaped by Martin Wallace and Jarvis Cocker and scored by Cocker with the aid of numerous Sheffield-based musicians.

Since the BFI has already tackled the industry directly with last year's *Steel* DVD compilation, Wallace and Cocker sensibly opt for something much more impressionistic. The opening shots crackle with sparks on the soundtrack as well as on the screen, suggesting something volcanic, as if the molten lava is being tamed by the power of human ingenuity.

And this isn't 'human' in the abstract sense: Cocker and Wallace have said that the shot that persuaded them to take on the project was a V-sign being flicked at Mitchell and Kenyon's camera in 1901 by a Rotherham steelworker – who presumably never lived to see David Bradley turning the same gesture into a symbol of bolshie northernness on the poster for *Kes* nearly 70 years later. Although only the latter's soundtrack is excerpted here, its spirit is threaded throughout, as is that of the great kitchen-sink dramas of the early 1960s.

The Big Melt is at least as much about leisure as work, even if the new context means that we're as likely to focus on a gleaming steel microphone as we are on the singing duo either side of it, or on the bench where lovers are canoodling, or the blades on which ice-skaters slip and pile up. (Similarly, one rapidly becomes conscious of the metal instruments on the soundtrack: flutes, brass, xylophones.) It's not so much men with movie cameras as men with moving girders, but Dziga Vertov would feel completely at home. **Disc:** Variable-quality source footage is an unavoidable issue with archive-based projects such as this, but at its best *The Big Melt* looks stunning, and the stereo soundtrack is unimpeachable. The major extra features a repeat performance of the entire score, this time concentrating on the musicians, with the film playing in the background. An engagingly candid Cocker and Wallace contribute a combined video interview and a written essay apiece. The booklet also helpfully lists all the source titles, along with useful historical context from the BFI's Jan Faull.

CLASSE TOUS RISQUES

Claude Sautet; France 1960; BFI/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 12; 110 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: documentary 'Monsieur Ventura', original French and US trailers, booklet with new essay by John Patterson

Reviewed by Kate Stables

The abrupt street robbery that launches Claude Sautet's spare and melancholy thriller is shot with such bob-and-weave fleetness that it seems unnervingly modern. Yet at the same time there's a fascinating whiff of neorealism in the almost

documentary shots of the teeming Milan railway station where his hero tries to hide in plain sight.

Despite these inducements, audiences overlooked this terse but tender gangster drama in 1960 in favour of the hipper *A bout de souffle*, with which it was unlucky to share a release date. Here Jean-Paul Belmondo, who also appeared in Godard's film, is gawkily arresting as the 'guy who won't attract attention', rescuing a gangster returning to France with his small sons after years on the run. But the film belongs firmly to Lino Ventura, described perceptively in the accompanying documentary as "a mix of Spencer Tracy and Wallace Beery". His stoical, watchful performance as Abel, the gangland boss deserted by his former lieutenants, is punctuated by sudden jolts of violence, reminding you forcibly of the actor's previous career as a pro wrestler. It's a portrayal that fuses, as John Patterson's essay notes, the classic romantic fatalism of the doomed French gangster with the character's muscular determination to protect his children.

Alongside the tense unwrapping of dishonour among thieves, there's a moving yet rigorously restrained strand of loss and regret played out in the film's shabby bedsits and Paris streets, shot in eloquent pigeon-wing greys.

Discs: Both the DVD and Blu-ray transfers are pin-sharp, and the new restoration shows off everything from Georges Delerue's moody score to the nubbly texture of Belmondo's suits. John Patterson's top-notch essay uncovers the role of jailbird-turned-author José Giovanni in the film's screenplay – he also penned *Le Trou* for Jacques Becker and *Le Deuxième Souffle* for Melville, creating "an informal triptych (and a damn good triple bill)". The gruffly affectionate documentary *Monsieur Ventura* also earns its inclusion.

KING OF THE HILL

Steven Soderbergh; USA 1993; Criterion/Region A Blu-ray and Region 1 DVD Dual Format; 103 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: new interviews with Soderbergh and A.E. Hotchner, Soderbergh's 'The Underneath', visual essay on Soderbergh, trailers, booklet

Reviewed by Dan Callahan

After his breakthrough feature debut *sex, lies, and videotape* (1989) and a somewhat disappointing sophomore effort, *Kafka* (1991), Steven Soderbergh made this carefully controlled Depression-era period piece, which was based on a memoir by A.E. Hotchner. Twelve-year-old



Growing pains: *King of the Hill*

Aaron (Jesse Bradford) is living with his parents and his adorable little brother Sullivan (Cameron Boyd) in a shabby hotel room. Money is tight, so Sullivan is sent to live with others for a time. Aaron's gentle mother (Lisa Eichhorn) has to go away to recover from tuberculosis, and when his father (Jeroen Krabbe) leaves him all alone to go off and sell watches, Aaron has to fend for himself, with little money, little to eat and wolves at the door waiting to throw him out of the hotel.

Soderbergh takes this desperate subject, which might have been made into a four-hankie tearjerker by Steven Spielberg, and applies his dry touch to it, emptying the material of easy pathos and finding a much harder core of toughness underneath. The direction is highly assured and there are several virtuoso displays of Soderbergh's skill, none more suggestive than the nightmarish sequence in which Aaron tries to save his father's car but can't reach the brakes and goes careening down all kinds of roads without being able to stop. There are pungent character portraits of other people in the hotel, such as the pervy Mr Mungo (Spalding Gray), yet everything looks like it is taking place in the idealised memory of a child, even the moment when Aaron is reduced to tearing out and eating photos of food from a magazine. His imagination both saves him and makes him remember things that most of us would prefer to forget.

Disc: A beautiful transfer that features a new interview with Soderbergh, who complains of the film: "It's too beautiful."

LUBITSCH IN BERLIN: SIX FILMS BY ERNST LUBITSCH 1918-1921

Germany 1918-21; Eureka!/Masters of Cinema/Region 2 DVD; 580 minutes; 4:3; Features: essay booklets, feature-length documentary 'Ernst Lubitsch in Berlin: From Schönhauser Allee to Hollywood'

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

Revered by directors from Billy Wilder to Wes Anderson, Ernst Lubitsch has made his presence felt across a full century of cinema. This box-set, which collects six of Lubitsch's best German films, takes us back, not quite to the actor-turned-director's first steps into filmmaking but to an early golden period. Here, the fabled 'Lubitsch Touch' is abundant, in movies that combine all his signature sophistication and 'superjokes' with an invigorating boisterousness.

Three of these films star Ossi Oswalda, a pretty blonde actress inevitably boosted as Germany's Mary Pickford but with an earthiness and energy that are all her own. Oswalda appeared many times for Lubitsch, and the performances captured here reveal her to be an infectiously buoyant screen presence: in *Die Puppe* (1919), she plays a flesh-and-blood woman yearning for her husband, who believes her to be an animatronic doll; in *Ich möchte kein Mann sein* (1918), she's a teenage brat who sneaks out of her uncle's house in drag and snogs her guardian in a nightclub.

Oswalda also stars in one of the set's most precious jewels: the elaborate bedroom farce *Die Austerprinzessin* (1919). An anti-capitalist (or rather anti-American) satire, *Die Austerprinzessin* proceeds on the basis that the only way to follow a gag is with another, more



APPOINTMENT WITH DEATH

Don Siegel's remake of the 1946 classic, far from playing it safe, became an inspiration for directors from Boorman to Tarantino

THE KILLERS

Don Siegel; US 1964; Arrow Region B Blu-ray; 95 minutes; 1.85:1/1.33:1; Features: Screen Killer, Reagan Kills, Don Siegel Interview from 1984, Gallery, 40-page booklet featuring new writing by Mike Sutton, Contemporary reviews, Projectionist notes

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Michael Reeves, the short-lived English director, was obsessed with Don Siegel's *The Killers* – a 1964 remake of Robert Siodmak's 1946 adaptation of Ernest Hemingway's 1927 short story – and would watch it over and over while preparing his horror films. The cool, brittle, brutal ruthlessness of Siegel's picture resonates especially with Reeves's *The Sorcerers*, but seeped into the groundwater of genre, directly inspiring John Boorman and Michael Ritchie to put Lee Marvin in similar roles (and suits) in *Point Blank* and *Prime Cut* and establishing the seemingly detached, actually sentimental hit man as an acceptable crime movie protagonist, as picked up by John Woo, Quentin Tarantino and too many others to list.

Hemingway introduced the chatty, snarling hit team (whose trivial talk about diner food is picked up in *Pulp Fiction*) and Siodmak made them figures of hardboiled, quirky menace played by Charles McGraw and William Conrad. In *The Lineup*, a 1958 TV spin-off, Siegel featured Eli Wallach and Robert Keith as Dancer, a meticulous hired gun, and Julian, his oddly prissy handler (who collects their victims' dying words in a notebook). Officially, *The Lineup* is about the cops and the killers are the antagonists, but Siegel is less interested in the plods than he is intrigued by criminals, whose professionalism reads onscreen as heroic no matter how perverse or despicable they are. It's a short step to killers-as-protagonists.

In the early 1960s, Siegel was alternating film and television work. Universal hired him to make the first movies for TV, bearing in mind the likelihood of overseas theatrical release – which is why this Blu-ray gives you the option of either the 1.85:1 image Siegel composed for, or the academy frame it would have had on TV. Playing it safe, the studio looked to properties they already owned. Just after *The Killers*, Siegel shot *The Hanged Man*, a remake of Robert Montgomery's *Ride the Pink Horse* (1947). In the event, *The Killers* was judged too violent for TV and went out to cinemas. Suspicion remains that Siegel spilled scarlet gore on Lee Marvin's impeccable shoes and dwelled on Angie Dickinson's acute distress as she is dangled out of a window precisely to secure that outcome. He liked heroes who didn't follow rules set for them – inquisitive assassins and throw-away-the-badge cops – and ran his career like that too.

Hemingway's story poses but doesn't answer a question – why does the victim of a gangland



Shady killers: sharklike Clu Gulager and avenger Lee Marvin

execution calmly accept his fate? For Siodmak, the original story is the prologue for a *Citizen Kane*-like exploration of the dead man's reasons. An insurance investigator (Edmond O'Brien) interviews folk who reveal the background of the Swede (Burt Lancaster), an ex-boxer brought low by his twisted involvement with a femme fatale (Ava Gardner) and a heist-organising crook (Albert Dekker). Screenwriter Gene L. Coon, best-remembered as a producer and writer on *Star Trek* (he created the Klingons and Khan), follows the old script – despite Siegel's insistence "I don't want to use any Hemingway dialogue and no scenes from the other movie" – with knockout Angie Dickinson and cold-eyed Ronald Reagan (in his final film) replacing Gardner and

The sparkly TV look is bright yet cold, in its own way as evocative as the film noir shadows of Siodmak's version



Angie Dickinson

Dekker. But there's one major change. Here, the killers themselves – ageing, controlled Charlie Strom (Lee Marvin) and younger, crazier Lee (Clu Gulager) – wonder why their mark, ex-racing driver Johnny North (John Cassavetes), doesn't take the opportunity to run, and do the rounds of witnesses who fill in the backstory. At first, Charlie sees an opportunity to grab a missing million dollars and retire. Eventually, he admits it's more important to him to find out the truth... which transforms him from dispassionate executioner to semi-righteous avenger.

Marvin's Charlie is an urban wolf who only becomes human in his last moments – making a gun-finger at a cop as he slumps gutshot on a perfect lawn. Gulager's Lee, playing with toy cars and architect's models and indulging health-nut quirks, is more obviously psychotic but tags along loyally, matching his partner's sunglasses but smiling sharklike where Charlie is inexpressive. The sparkly TV look (captured beautifully in Arrow's new Blu-ray release), mixing obvious stock footage and studio shots with location work, is bright yet cold, in its own way as evocative as the *film noir* shadows of Siodmak's version. Vivid items of fetishist costume (Dickinson's tailored jumpsuit) or the primary-coloured cars are as jazzy visually as 'Johnny' Williams's Lalo Schifrin-like score is aurally.

This is an impersonal world of freeways and public spaces, making the doomed Johnny's obsessive love for a bad dame all the more striking. An interesting, unstressed evocation of the earlier picture is the casting of Virginia Christine, the Swede's cast-off blonde girlfriend, in a cameo as the blind administrator menaced in Siegel's radically new opening scene, in which we get a Peckinpah-like glimpse of kids playing 'bang bang you're dead' before the hit men invade a School for the Blind where, absurdly, Johnny is teaching motor mechanics to sightless adults. **S**

New releases

 elaborate one. Oswalda's rich kid, her bloated father (Victor Janson), her darling Prince Nucki (Harry Liedtke) and their armies of attendants all bicker, dance and mislead each other, dwarfed by sickeningly oversized sets.

A similar comedy of scale animates the Arabian Nights farce *Sumurun* (1920), in which Lubitsch himself and Pola Negri reprise the roles they took on stage for Max Reinhardt. The humour here is broader than we might expect from Lubitsch, but with Paul Wegener as a vicious old sheikh, ballerina Jenny Hasselqvist as a lovesick harem girl and sublime crowd choreography, the pleasure is only intermittently guilty.

Emil Jannings, who had thundered for Lubitsch before with Negri in *Die Augen der Mumie Ma* (1918), strides into view as a lascivious Henry VIII in the historical epic *Anna Boleyn* (1920). Henny Porten is touching as Boleyn, Aud Egede-Nissen is a minxy Jane Seymour, and Jannings is in clover, while Lubitsch displays his mastery of both interiors and crowds – and delivers an ending with a big emotional kick.

Negri, who starred in seven of Lubitsch's finest silents, despite tormenting him on set, returns for the triumphant finale. *Die Bergkatz* is a wicked, exuberant romp that matches wild set design with uninhibited star turns from Negri and Janson. Ornate lens-masks, which frame the action in ovals, stripes and wiggles, give the movie the texture of a child's picture-book sprung to life. The famous dream sequence, in which Negri chomps on her lover's biscuit heart before they dance to a snowman orchestra, typifies the film's whimsical but lusty charm.

A year later, the real Pickford would make her entrance, luring Lubitsch across the Atlantic to United Artists. Some of his cohorts from these magical films would follow him to Hollywood, while others, like Oswalda, remained behind. This set offers a glimpse not just of a masterful director but of the German film industry at its artistically adventurous peak. **Disc:** This is Masters of Cinema's 2010 *Lubitsch in Berlin* set repackaged, the films sharply restored with the original German intertitles and optional English subtitles. A feature-length German documentary dwells on Lubitsch's early career and reception in Germany, with contributions from his family, and there is a booklet of essays by David Cairns, Anna Thorngate and Ignatiy Vishnevetsky.

FILMS BY RADLEY METZGER

THE PRIVATE AFTERNOONS OF PAMELA MANN

USA 1974; Distribpix/Region-free NTSC DVD; 83 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: 'hard' and 'soft' versions, commentary by Metzger, interviews, locations featurette, outtakes, trailer, ephemera gallery, booklet

NAKED CAME THE STRANGER

USA 1975; Distribpix/Region-free NTSC DVD; 84 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: commentary by Metzger, 'film facts' subtitle track, locations featurette, outtakes, 'soft' scenes, trailers, ephemera gallery, booklet

Reviewed by David Thompson

Following the luxurious editions of the most famous of the Radley Metzger hardcore films made under his 'nom de porn' of Henry Paris, *The Opening of Misty Beethoven* (1976) and *Barbara Broadcast* (1977), the enterprising 'adult film'



Cruel world: *Mouchette*

distribution company Distribpix has accorded almost the same level of devotion to Metzger's first two films from the era of 70s 'porno-chic'.

Prior to the floodgates being opened by the astounding success of Gerard Damiano's *Deep Throat* (1972), Metzger had produced a remarkably stylish collection of erotic films, shooting in Europe and dubbing the results in English primarily for the US market. Now finding the public appetite for soft-core sophistication to be on the wane, he decided to make his own entry into the world of harder stuff (ie showing real and explicit sex) with *The Private Afternoons of Pamela Mann* (1974). The mischievous narrative involves a worried husband despatching a private detective to film the sexual exploits of his unfaithful wife, only for the detective himself to become one of her conquests and the audience to discover that the whole enterprise is a game cooked up by the libertine couple themselves.

The film merrily delivers the expected sex scenes as if they were musical numbers, and scores high on wit and playfulness. Every now and then a young woman conducting a survey pops up to pose the heroine some convoluted question about world affairs, finally explaining that she's there "to give the film socially redeeming value" (she's played by one Doris Toumarkine, later to become an established film critic).

Metzger's film sets itself apart from most of the genre through his sheer pleasure in the filmmaking process. He felt liberated by using small crews and Super 16mm equipment (his resourceful cinematographer Paul Glickman went on to work with Larry Cohen and Henry Jaglom), and shows himself to be a deft editor – a final montage is almost Roegian in its complexity. Furthermore, as Metzger points out in his commentary, because he was operating in New York he was fortunate to have actors who did porn rather than porn stars who would try to act, and many of his players had worked in off-Broadway theatre (two of them, Eric Edwards and Georgina Spelvin, give charmingly candid career interviews, even if they have almost nothing to say about making *Pamela Mann*).

The great success of *Pamela Mann* led to *Naked Came the Stranger* (1975), based on a famous literary hoax of the time – a group of *Newsday* journalists concocted a deliberately tawdry sex novel under a pseudonym and found themselves on the bestseller lists. This time Metzger's cheating couple are radio hosts whose shows are broadcast from their Long Island mansion.

Again, prankishness and sophistication are the saving grace of the film, which boasts at least two deliriously wacky sequences – one a tryst on the top deck of a red London bus driving up and down Fifth Avenue, the other a black-and-white silent-film pastiche in the ballroom of a once-grand Brooklyn hotel. As with *Pamela Mann*, Metzger knew well how to cast a film, with Darby Lloyd Rains as the delightfully kooky wife and Levi Richards her adulterous husband.

Were it not for all their cinematic qualities and sexual generosity, these features and those that followed would no doubt still have been classified by the BBFC as 'sex works', and therefore could only have been distributed in the UK under extremely restricted circumstances.

Disc: Unlike *The Opening of Misty Beethoven* and *Barbara Broadcast*, these earlier titles are only on DVD, though in cleaned-up transfers (the last of the Paris films, *Maraschino Cherry*, is also distributed by Distribpix, but so far in an extras-free edition). The 'soft' version of *Pamela Mann*, in which lead actress Barbara Bourbon comments throughout on the action, is of purely academic value. The extras are generous but highly variable in quality and interest, and the commentaries aren't often scene specific – the impression is that Metzger, while happy to reminisce, actively dislikes watching his own films.

MOUCHETTE

Robert Bresson; France 1967; Artificial Eye/Region B Blu-ray (DVD also available); Certificate 15; 81 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: documentary ('For Instance, Bresson')

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Bresson's take on the misery memoir (albeit sourced from a Georges Bernanos novel) clearly ranks among his masterpieces, although it might not be the best starting point for beginners: even those who appreciate it far more than Pauline Kael did might have to concede she had a point when she complained that watching it was "like taking a whipping and watching every stroke coming". Although Bresson would become even bleaker in his old age (especially in *The Devil, Probably* and *L'Argent*), and the harshness and casual cruelty of *Mouchette* weren't unprecedented even then, it lacks the historical distance of *The Trial of Joan of Arc* or the donkey of *Au hasard Balthazar*.

Naturally, Bresson doesn't wallow in the plight of his 14-year-old protagonist (Nadine Nortier), but every isolated slap, shove and muttered insult conveys a lifetime of pain. Her mother is dying (her brief monologue at the start sets the tone of existential despair), her father is an alcoholic sadist and her brother a helpless baby. The clatter of her clogs marks her out as 'different' at school, as do her self-identifying acts of rebellion: ironically, the one time she's uncomplicatedly happy is when she's hurling mud at the more popular girls or crashing into other dodgem-car riders. She says little, and the interior monologues of Bresson's 1950s films are now a distant memory, but her sullen pout is every bit as communicative as an impassioned speech. *Mouchette* wants to be 'normal' but she's scarcely had a childhood – and the adult world is hardly more appealing, especially when it suddenly crashes into her life during a stormy night in the forest.

Disc: Aside from a couple of barely perceptible scratches, the source print is virtually pristine and the transfer brings out every nuance of Ghislain Cloquet's cinematography. The forest scenes haven't felt this tactile since the film was circulated in 35mm, and the soundtrack is equally crisp and detailed. But French speakers won't appreciate the compulsory subtitles (which, sadly, seem to be becoming the norm on this label's foreign-language releases), and the decision to include the German version of Theodor Kotulla's fascinating 30-minute 'making of' *For Instance, Bresson* (1967) is baffling: every time Bresson opens his mouth, he's drowned out by an unnecessary voiceover translation. A purely French version also exists (it's on the Criterion DVD), so why wasn't this pursued instead?

PLAY IT COOL

Michael Winner; UK 1962; Network/Region 2 DVD; Certificate U; 90 minutes; Features: trailers, image gallery

Reviewed by Vic Pratt

There were many British answers to Elvis Presley in the golden era of rock 'n' roll. Most couldn't hold a candle to the King – but Liverpool's Billy Fury could. He was the real deal – gifted, gorgeous and as at home belting out a self-penned rocker as a big ballad, though famously quiet and retiring away from the microphone.

Play It Cool was his first and best big-screen vehicle. Captured here in his heyday, he sings some cracking songs, and there are precious performances from other pre-Beatles popsters, notably Helen Shapiro and Bobby Vee. The film also marked the feature debut of exuberant young director Michael Winner, drafted in by executive producer Julian Wintle, who hoped that Winner would be 'hep' with the kids in the cast. Wintle, Winner recalled, viewed the project as "infinitely

beneath him" but promised the director a box of cigars if shooting finished on schedule. It did, but Winner delivered more than that, energetically concocting one of the period's warmest, liveliest and silliest British pop musicals. Somehow, brash young turk Winner – who, said *Kine Weekly*, "directs like a frenzied *Sunday Night at the London Palladium* compère with a constant stream of gags broadcast through his loudhailer" – understood shy Billy and showed him off to best advantage.

Off camera, apparently, Fury – a gentle, unlikely pop star – meekly sat squashed into a Pinewood canteen corner by his youthful supporting cast, who noisily behaved as if they owned the place (until Winner told them off). But on screen, decked out in natty white jacket and narrow black tie, his remarkable quiff inexplicably static despite his snake-hipped gyrations, urged on by Winner's lively camera, Billy is terrific – powerfully voiced, effortlessly sexy, shoulders hunched, shaking out his spindly fingers like some gauntly groovy marionette. It's easy to see why even now, decades after his early death, he's still the tops with Brit-rock aficionados.

Also frozen in time here is 'the twist', allegedly everybody's favourite dance step *circa* 1962. Unfortunately, when the film was shot, the twist was so new that nobody knew how to do it and American 'twist instructors' had to be drafted in. Notably, some of the kids, enthusiastically leaping skywards in proto-pogo, couldn't quite get the hang of it. But that's all part of the transitory fun of *Play It Cool*. Like a pop-Polaroid, it's a splendid snapshot of the British music scene just a brief while before Billy would find himself edged out of the hit parade and into a corner once more – by four other fellows from beside the Mersey.

Disc: A sharp transfer is accompanied by the theatrical trailer and a stills gallery.



Play It Cool One of the period's warmest, liveliest and silliest British pop musicals... Billy Fury is effortlessly sexy, like some gauntly groovy marionette

THE POIROT COLLECTION

MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS/DEATH ON THE NILE/EVIL UNDER THE SUN

Sidney Lumet/John Guillermin/Guy Hamilton; USA 1974/78/82; StudioCanal/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 127/140/117 minutes; 1.85:1

THE AGATHA CHRISTIE COLLECTION

Includes films as above plus 'The Mirror Crack'd' (Guy Hamilton; USA 1980; StudioCanal/Universal Pictures Italia/Region B Blu-ray; 106 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: subtitles, language options)

Reviewed by Patrick Fahy

Amid adaptations of Shakespeare, Beatrix Potter and E.M. Forster, the ever-tasteful British producers John Brabourne and Richard Goodwin mined their most profitable seam with a quartet of notably handsome, star-laden Agatha Christie thrillers. StudioCanal's UK Blu-ray collection features their three Hercule Poirot titles, while an Italian edition, with superior disc quality, also includes the Miss Marple film *The Mirror Crack'd*.

The series sets off on the right track with *Murder on the Orient Express*. Director Sidney Lumet claimed that he wanted "glamour, gaiety and humour", though the film also stokes hemmed-in tension reminiscent of his *12 Angry Men*, as DP Geoffrey Unsworth captures the stuffy, eerie confines of the eponymous snowbound locomotive. Ingrid Bergman won an Oscar for her timorous missionary, while Albert Finney effects the transformation of his career as an unnerving, pin-sharp Poirot.

Boasting Jack Cardiff's knockout location photography and Anthony Powell's ravishing, Oscar-winning costumes, *Death on the Nile* presents Peter Ustinov as a kindlier, more urbane Poirot. The script, by past master of the detective divertissement Anthony Shaffer, brings a welcome playful streak, with much affectionate teasing of the genre (David Niven recalling "the case of the decapitated clergyman", for instance) and a weakness for wordplay, such as Maggie Smith's dread of "heat and heathens".

The Mirror Crack'd (from the novel Christie dedicated to "Margaret Rutherford, in admiration", after the actress's Marple debut) proves the weakest mystery, despite Angela Lansbury's upbeat (but infuriatingly laid-up) sleuth. Opening with a whodunit-within-a-whodunit (a mirror of sorts?), it concerns Hollywood filmmakers shooting near Marple's village and makes easy jokes about their brashness. The sombre denouement was allegedly inspired by a tragedy in Gene Tierney's life.

Mirror's director Guy Hamilton is on surer ground in the atypically jolly *Evil Under the Sun*. Again scripted by Shaffer (in his element), it's so sun-drenched and sparkling that it's practically feelgood, shot gorgeously on Mallorca by Christopher Challis and buoyed by John Lanchbery's superb Cole Porter arrangements. The swan song, and least lucrative, of the Brabourne-Goodwin series, it gave way to television's encroaching and ongoing love of Christie.

Disc: The barebones UK Blu-rays retain specks, minor jumps and a DVD softness. The Italian *Orient* and *Nile* discs look only



Television

BATES MOTEL – SEASON 1

American Genre/Kerry Ehrin Productions/
Universal/A&E; USA 2013; Universal TV/Region 2
DVD; Certificate 18; 482 minutes; 16:9; Features:
Paley Center panel discussion, deleted scenes

Reviewed by Sergio Angelini

In the 1990 TV movie *Psycho IV: The Beginning*, Joseph Stefano drew on his screenplay for the Hitchcock original and the sketchy early history of Norman Bates in Robert Bloch's source novel to explore the troubled lad's relationship with his mother Norma. This becomes the crux of *Bates Motel*, a completely modernised reboot with Vera Farmiga as the *mater familias* who buys a failing motel after her husband dies. The show then follows Norma's attempts to settle with her son in the Oregon township of White Pine Bay (actually Vancouver), a community that, it transpires, is boosting its ailing economy with human trafficking and the mass cultivation of marijuana.

Black comedy is never far away (Mrs Bates even complains, "Why do crazy people keep gravitating around me?"). It's hard not to sympathise – within a couple of days of arriving, she is raped, her cop lover turns out to be importing sex slaves from China, men are set alight in public, and disinterred bodies are dumped in her bed. Dylan, her son from a previous marriage, makes an unwelcome return, and then there are Norman's unexplained blackouts... Contrasting Norman's high-school tribulations and Norma's business woes with their developing relationship with Dylan, most of the plot gets used up in the first half a dozen instalments, though the show rallies for a bang-up finish.

Disc: Extras include an hour-long cast-and-crew discussion in which, *inter alia*, the debt to *Twin Peaks* is acknowledged.

COLONEL MARCH INVESTIGATES

Eros/ITV; UK 1955; Simply Media/Region 2
DVD; 68 minutes; Certificate PG; 4:3

Reviewed by Sergio Angelini

The new ITV channel was only a couple of days old when Boris Karloff made his first appearance as Colonel March on Saturday 24 September 1955. The character originated in the stories of locked-room murders and impossible crimes by John Dickson Carr in *The Strand Magazine*. For the show, Karloff sports an eye-patch – possibly a misreading of Carr's original description of March as having a "bland eye" – and proves to be a genial protagonist in these three modest but entertaining episodes.

In the first, based on the story 'Hot Money', loot from a bank robbery apparently vanishes from a locked office under surveillance; in the second, 'Death in the Dressing Room', a Javanese dancer seemingly gives a performance *after* being stabbed to death; and in the third and best tale, 'The New Invisible Man', two disembodied gloves appear to shoot a man dead.

Seen today the three episodes included here are notable for their clear interest in the underdog (an innocent bank teller blamed for robbery and murder) and the émigré (from Indonesia and Russia), which is perhaps no great surprise as the show was largely created by victims of the Hollywood blacklist. Cy Endfield (who has



Parks and Recreation The show is surprisingly civic-minded, powered in no small way by the relentless positivity of Amy Poehler's Leslie Knope

a cameo as a patron of the British Museum) directed all three episodes, while the scripts are attributed to one 'Leo David' but are really by Abraham Polonsky and Walter Bernstein. It is high time that the rest of the episodes got a legitimate release on home video.

Disc: The transfer to disc of the black-and-white 35mm original is perfectly efficient. No extras.

PARKS AND RECREATION – SERIES 1-4

Fabulous Films Ltd/Fremantle Media Enterprises; USA 2009-12; Fabulous Films/Region 2 DVD; 1,593 minutes; Certificate 15; Features: extended episodes, commentaries, deleted scenes, bloopers

Reviewed by Lisa Kerrigan

Parks and Recreation was originally conceived by creators Michael Schur and Greg Daniels as a spin-off of the US version of *The Office*, but was quickly reassigned as a standalone sitcom about a local government department, and aside from inheriting the trappings of the mockumentary format it bears little resemblance to its more cynical sitcom relation or their caustic British progenitor.

Set in the small city of Pawnee, Indiana, where deputy parks director Leslie Knope is overly devoted to public service, seasons one to three follow the efforts of the department's staff to build a park, withstand a government shutdown and face down their sworn enemies – librarians. While season one starts slowly, as soon as the characters are established the series has the confidence to be optimistic about the role of

local government while also capitalising on the comic potential of bureaucratic absurdities. What emerges is a show that is surprisingly civic-minded, powered in no small way by the relentless positivity of main character Leslie Knope, who has been compared to *Election's* Tracy Flick – although her scrupulous adherence to fairness, enthusiasm for democracy and dreams of being the second female president (after Hillary) also suggest an adult Lisa Simpson.

As Leslie, former *Saturday Night Live* star Amy Poehler exudes capability and confidence as well as a prodigious talent for pratfalls. Leslie's relationship with her best friend, nurse Ann Perkins (Rashida Jones), also adds a refreshing focus on female camaraderie. Buoyed by supporting characters including libertarian parks director Ron Swanson (Nick Offerman, playing the epitome of manliness), dimwit Andy Dwyer (Chris Pratt) and permanently sullen April Ludgate (Aubrey Plaza), the show matches sharp writing with complementary performances.

In seasons three and four the series becomes more politically minded, and the change in pace adds an extra layer of satire. Rob Lowe is drafted in to play city manager and fitness freak Chris Traeger, and his exuberant manner lends the show a sprinkling of *West Wing* style hyperactivity, albeit at the local level of Pawnee City Hall. The series not only manages to be terrifically funny but is also a rare thing – a workplace comedy that is joyous.

Disc: The set is packed with extras – extended episodes, deleted scenes, bloopers and more. **S**

New releases

◀ slightly better, though the Italian *Evil* and *Mirror* transfers are excellent (*Evil* being far richer than the pale UK transfer). The Italian discs offer subtitles, language options and more generous chapter breaks. Why the Blu-rays omit the Poirot 'making of' programmes (included on the DVDs) is a mystery.

TRANSPORT FROM PARADISE

Zbynek Brynych; Czechoslovakia 1962; Second Run/Region-free DVD; Certificate 12; 92 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: booklet

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Although understandably billed as a Holocaust film, this queasily gripping pre-New Wave Czech feature is primarily a study of the Theresienstadt (Terezín) ghetto, the ironically named 'paradise' of the title, *circa* 1943-44. Whereas the Nazis went to considerable and mostly very successful lengths to hide what they were up to in Poland, they cynically promoted Terezín as some kind of model community, making propaganda films about its virtues and even contemplating a visit from the International Red Cross.

Naturally, things are very different behind the scenes, and those who have seen Zbynek Brynych's better-known *The Fifth Horseman Is Fear* (1965) will recognise his gift for turning the outwardly banal into the sweatily unnerving. He strikes a deft balance between acknowledging the darkly absurd aspects of the situation without ever trivialising what the Theresienstadt inhabitants went through – something that was never especially likely since co-screenwriter Arnost Lustig was himself interned there. One example among many: a room turned into a makeshift labyrinth by ceiling-high stacks of numbered suitcases, their owners awaiting transport to what are widely and accurately rumoured to be death camps.

Brynych and Lustig are also expectedly alert to the complex stratification of the ghetto: its Jewish inhabitants may be clear-eyed resistance activists, deluded optimists, bussed-in actors helping the Nazis maintain their fiction, or outright collaborators. The villain of the piece is Marmulstaub (Cestmír Randa), the vice-chairman of the town council, who turns a blind eye to the reasons behind his former superior's official 'disappearance' (he both knew and said too much) while simultaneously exploiting his underlings, knowing that they'll do anything to escape their likely fate. But many of the other Theresienstadt inhabitants find themselves facing impossible decisions. For instance, is it more morally justifiable to commit outright murder on the grounds that a quick death is better than the slow torture the victim would otherwise certainly face? In a world where conventional ethical notions have been completely upended, where 'paradise' is literally hell on earth, the answer is clearly yes.

Disc: With no sign of a Czech restoration on the horizon and without the budget to create one itself, Second Run has sourced this disc from an analogue videotape master. It's certainly watchable, but no more than that. However, the booklet is superb, with playwright Roy Kift offering a wealth of background material on Theresienstadt's unique historical, social and cultural situation.



Ghetto hell: *Transport from Paradise*

THE UMBRELLAS OF CHERBOURG: 50TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Jacques Demy; France 1963; StudioCanal/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 93 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: 'The World of Jacques Demy' documentary (92 minutes), 'Once upon a Time: The Umbrellas of Cherbourg' documentary (52 minutes), Geoff Andrew and Virginie Ledoyen commentaries, BFI audio interview with Catherine Deneuve, 'The Restoration of The Umbrellas of Cherbourg' featurette, stills gallery, 1963 trailer, 2013 trailer

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Watching the hefty package of documentaries accompanying this ravishing Blu-ray release, your overwhelming sentiment is astonishment that Jacques Demy's bittersweet, candy-coloured sung-through masterpiece ever got made at all. Demy and composer Michel Legrand struggled for six months to merge words and music seamlessly, and spent a dispiriting year performing the script-cum-score to bemused producers before Mag Bodard was amused enough by its oddity to take it on.

Anne Vernon (who plays Madame Emery) was horrified by the 'simplistic' script, and the cast felt stressed by the demands of simultaneously acting and miming to hit the recorded playback cues. Yet the final result is sublime, a gloriously innovative tribute both to the Hollywood musical and to Marcel Pagnol's thwarted-romance melodramas of the 1930s. The vibrancy of both soundtrack and colours on this Cine-Tamaris restoration underlines the rich relationship between artifice and emotion in the film. Demy set out explicitly to make the audience cry (the score is even marked up for its 'third hankie' moment), and his hunch that "love is more interesting if it's sung" is borne out by the lyrical railway-station parting of the ill-starred Guy (Nino Castelnuovo) and Geneviève (Catherine Deneuve), where the film's colour palette is also at its palest.

Production designer Bernard Evein worked in tandem with Demy to create vivid settings for the drama – such as the palpitating orange-and-pink wallpaper of the Emery household, which is paired with hot red costuming to signal the marry-her-off melodrama that will envelope Geneviève and her mother. Nonetheless, one of the film's discreet strengths is that it always has one foot in reality – an unwanted pregnancy, the discreet evocation of the social cost of the Algerian war, and a hard-won pragmatism about romance ("People only die of love in movies"), which tempers all that lushness with a rueful and invaluable authenticity.

Disc: A fabulous transfer, whose colours are true to the original Eastman register (those cat-sick green and Schiaparelli-pink walls are intact). The soundtrack is clean and crisp, and does full justice to Legrand's sweeping score.

First among equals in the fat extras package are Agnès Varda's winding but winning documentary *The World of Jacques Demy* and an assured, rather more concise overview of the film by Geoff Andrew.

WHO IS HARRY KELLERMAN AND WHY IS HE SAYING THOSE TERRIBLE THINGS ABOUT ME?

Ulu Grosbard; USA 1971; Paramount/Region 1 NTSC DVD; 107 minutes; 16:9

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

A forgotten entry both in the annals of the American New Wave and in Dustin Hoffman's rise to stardom, this loose-jointed escapade – from a Herb Gardner screenplay – was New Hollywood's effort at an all-American 8½, exploring the neurotic daydreams and frazzled psyche of a Bob Dylan-esque singer-songwriter megastar as he wrestles with loneliness, insomnia, ruined relationships and a self-doubt so intense he's schizophrenically waging a character-assassination campaign against himself.

With a shaggy Dylan coif and mumbly affect, Hoffman flits through the film in a relentless state of pleading confusion, bouncing off his possibly imagined German shrink (Jack Warden), his beleaguered accountant (Dom DeLuise), a theatre-director compatriot who's also a suave ladykiller (Gabriel Dell), and memories of an innocent old girlfriend (Regina Baff) and his unhappy ex-wife (Rose Gregorio). Things crystallise, after a fashion, once Barbara Harris shows up as a would-be actress at an audition, filling out a definitive post-60s flibbertigibbet with showstopping neurotic fireworks, landing her the Supporting Actress Oscar nomination that has given the film its only renown since its mild theatrical release.

The opening sequence may be one of cinema's deftest evocations of creative compulsion, as Hoffman's Georgie tapes a suicide note to his lofty Manhattan balcony but reconsiders his jump in order to rewrite the note and get the language right. (He ends up jumping anyway, grabbing after the note when the wind whisks it away – but it's only another fantasy.)

Clearly beloved by the Coen brothers – not only in respect to *Inside Llewyn Davis* but also sequences lifted wholesale for *The Big Lebowski* – Grosbard's tender little movie thrives via a profusion of ethnic-New York character acting, dallying as even American indies can no longer do on someone's babbling-brook speech patterns or idiosyncratic manner of conversation. (As Georgie's parents, Betty Walker and David Galef are mesmerising in their shrugging schtick.) Zested up briefly by Hoffman joining a live performance by Dr Hook & the Medicine Show (featuring Shel Silverstein on lead vocals), *Harry Kellerman* is a little slapdash, which if you're pining for the days of experimental, New Wavey, on-the-fly moviemaking is far from an insult.

Disc: Nice transfer of an archive print, but without frills. S

Lost and found

THE BURGLAR

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

The doomed-heist thriller *The Burglar* proves a powerful piece of *noir* filmmaking. It's a crime that it's been ignored for so long

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

Like Jerry Lewis, the *noir* novelist David Goodis has inspired more enthusiasm in France than back home in the States. Hollywood has turned to him for material from time to time – *Dark Passage* (1947), about a man who breaks out of jail to prove he didn't murder his wife, became one of the lesser Bogart-Bacall vehicles (and arguably inspired the TV series *The Fugitive*). Goodis's plagiarism suit wasn't settled when he died in 1967, aged 49. But his bleak stories of habitual losers finding how much more they've got to lose were taken far more seriously by the French. Truffaut turned his *Down There* into *Shoot the Pianist* (1960); Jean-Paul Belmondo starred in *Le Casse* (1971). *The Burglar* relocated to Athens; Jean-Jacques Beineix cast Gérard Depardieu in a Marseille-set version of *The Moon in the Gutter*; and *Made in U.S.A.*, Godard's unofficial 1966 adaptation of a Richard Stark novel, featured a character called David Goodis.

The one American production that really did Goodis proud was Paul Wendkos's *The Burglar* (1957), about a gang stealing a fabulous emerald necklace from the Philadelphia mansion of a phoney spiritualist – the only film for which Goodis adapted one of his own books. The plot – gang carries out big heist, gang heads inexorably towards doom, helped on its way by femme fatale and crooked cop – and fatalistic attitude are familiar; but what stays with you is an impression of originality and conviction.

The conviction is due largely to the actors – especially the chronically underused Dan Duryea as Nat Harbin, the burglar of the title, a skilled and careful professional struggling with personal demons and a crippling sense of responsibility towards Gladden, his mentor's daughter. Gladden ("Funny name for a girl," as one character points out) is the young Jayne Mansfield – recruited by producer Louis W. Kellman, the legend goes, after he saw how the crew reacted to her on the set of *Pete Kelly's Blues*. This is widely acknowledged as one of her best performances – sex-bomb persona under wraps, she projects deep unhappiness and an unfulfilled yearning for Nat – and without her there's no knowing when the film would have seen the light of day: as it was, it sat on the shelf for two years before being released to cash in on her notoriety.

The support is impressive too, particularly Mickey Shaughnessy (Elvis's mentor in *Jailhouse Rock*) as the gang's heavy Dohmer, whose eye for Gladden and impulsive temper help to pull the house down; the wiry, melancholy German actor Peter Capell as the jewellery expert Baylock, itching to sell the jewels and



Scene stealer: Dan Duryea in the title role in *The Burglar*

The plot and fatalistic attitude are familiar, but what stays with you is an impression of originality and conviction

retire; and Martha Vickers – Lauren Bacall's sex-kitten little sister in *The Big Sleep* – an ambivalent femme fatale, seducing Nat but at the same time appreciating him.

The film was shot on location, mostly in Philadelphia – Wendkos, Kellman and Goodis were all natives; so was the composer Sol Kaplan (*The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*), whose

bassoon-heavy score adds a layer of unease. There are some thuddingly arty touches – the oddly 21st-century lower-case sans serif opening titles over footage of Duryea pacing through rundown industrial districts; the jarring close-ups, jump cuts and extreme reverb used to reflect Gladden's panic when Dohmer tries to force himself on her – and some painful cod psychologising ("It's almost as if he wanted to get caught," the wise old police chief muses of Harbin). The climax takes place on the Steel Pier at Atlantic City: as Nat and Gladden enter the funhouse, crooked cop in hot pursuit, a voice intones, "We, the dead, welcome you." On its UK release, *Monthly Film Bulletin* complained of "technical virtuosity which eventually becomes merely precious and tricky". You can see that point. You can also see a bold young director trying to make his mark, getting the most out of a low budget and an unstarry cast, editing himself to give the film a sharp pace that's usefully at odds with the overwhelming mood of depression and anxiety.

It's hard to say why such a curious, powerful film has been overlooked – it was included in a Columbia/TCM box-set a couple of years ago in the US but nothing is available in the UK. Perhaps it has been overshadowed by Mansfield's campy, oversexed image. Wendkos went on to direct the *Gidget* films and vast numbers of (often high-quality) TV movies, which means that nobody's going to be running retrospective seasons or espousing him as a lost auteur any time soon. But lately Goodis's reputation has been on the rise – Paul Thomas Anderson has cited him as one of his main literary influences, and in 2012 five of his novels joined Hemingway, Edith Wharton and Philip Roth in the perpetually in print Library of America. How nice if the best film versions of his work enjoyed the same recognition. **S**

WHAT THE PAPERS SAID



'This thriller is expounded with a display of technical virtuosity which eventually becomes precious and tricky. The extreme self-consciousness of the film is probably explained by the screenplay having been adapted by a novelist from his own book'
'Monthly Film Bulletin', 1957

'This film noir first feature lays on the style from the start... Wendkos doesn't break the mould, but he decorates it with no uncertain panache, as spiralling misfortune leads to a somewhat Wellesian finale in an Atlantic City boardwalk funhouse'
Trevor Johnston *'Time Out'*

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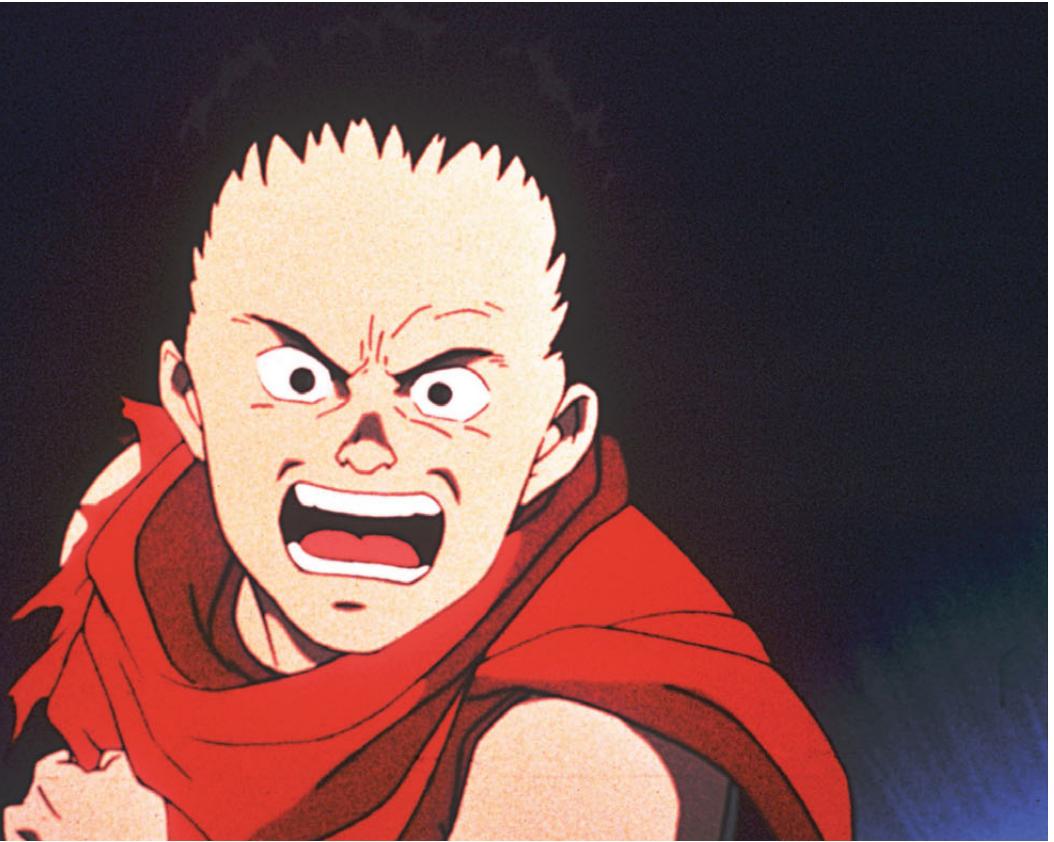
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The line of beauty: 'anime' became something of a buzz-word after the international breakthrough of *Akira* (above) in 1988; *Spirited Away* (above right)

THE MODERN FACE OF JAPANESE ART

ANIME: A HISTORY

By Jonathan Clements, BFI Palgrave Macmillan, £21.99, 256pp, ISBN 9781844573905

Reviewed by Jasper Sharp

Anime is the quintessential modern Japanese export, the centrepiece of a booming contents industry touted in a recent policy speech by Prime Minister Shinzō Abe as integral to the economic fortunes of a 21st-century 'Cool Japan'. And yet one can think of few media so intrinsically disconnected with a nation's quotidian lived-in reality as animation, be it of the computer-generated or pen-and-ink variety. Take, for example, the output of the country's most high-profile practitioners, Studio Ghibli, whose castles in the sky and down-the-rabbit-hole fantasy worlds draw as much from European children's literature as they do from local landscapes.

There are further ironies, as Jonathan Clements points out in his scholarly yet engaging history of this ostensibly most Japanese of cultural products. For starters, several of its key titles have received substantial financing from overseas: British company Manga Entertainment stumped

up 30 per cent of the budget for *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), somewhat fittingly for a tale that unfolds in a future in which geographical boundaries and the line between the virtual and the real are blurred, while Disney invested directly in Hayao Miyazaki's Academy Award-winner *Spirited Away* (2001). Meanwhile, with many production processes farmed out to countries such as China or South Korea, it was estimated in 2012 that around 60-70 per cent of the animators working on Japanese animation weren't actually Japanese, mirroring a time some 50 years previously when Japanese studios similarly survived through invisible work-for-hire engagements for American clients, such as Tadahito Mochinaga's stop-motion animation work on Rankin-Bass's *Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer* (1964).

So what is 'anime' anyway? The term became something of a buzz-word following the landmark international breakthrough of *Akira* (1988), which almost single-handedly initiated the global *otaku* craze of the 1990s. To many, it is epitomised by hi-tech scenarios, predominantly hand-drawn character and background designs rendered with near-cinematic levels of verisimilitude, surprisingly graphic sex and violence, and an esoteric approach to its subject matter quite at odds with

Western norms of commercial animation.

Then there's the considerably more lucrative though less critically regarded side represented by the mass-market phenomenon of *Pokémon* and its ilk, the animated incarnations of which are often little more than portals to an ancillary merchandising 'media mix' of computer games, comics and trading cards. Clements states that, in tandem with Disney's 1996 acquisition of the Studio Ghibli back catalogue, such titles led to a mainstreaming of anime for a new generation of viewers across the world, with foreign revenues growing from between eight and ten per cent of the industry's annual income in 1995 to a peak of 45-50 per cent in 2002, and *Pokémon: The First Movie* (1998) grossing almost ten times as much as *Spirited Away* at the US box office.

In a Japanese context, however, it seems that even local pundits aren't entirely sure what is designated by the term 'anime'. Some trace anime's thematic and stylistic heritage back to the

Anime is epitomised by hi-tech scenarios, surprisingly graphic sex and violence and an esoteric approach to its subject matter



first Fuji TV broadcasts of Osamu Tezuka's *Astro Boy* in 1963, others to the increasingly ambitious theatrical spin-offs of the sci-fi television serials *Space Cruiser Yamato* (1977) and *Gundam* (1981), the phenomenal domestic success of Miyazaki's *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984), or the emergence of the OAV (original animated video) home-viewing market in the early 1980s. Anime is clearly not, however, a catch-all synonym for 'Japanese animation', with the existence of 'shojo anime', targeted at a young female demographic, enough in itself to demonstrate that futuristic subject matter is not a defining aspect.

Clements has exhaustively mapped out this terrain before in, among other works, *The Anime Encyclopedia: A Guide to Japanese Animation Since 1917*, co-written with Helen McCarthy. His latest publication, as its title suggests, is less concerned with precise one-size-fits-all definitions or with extrapolating general theories about a Japanese essence from a select handful of titles. Instead, it adopts a much more rigorous, fact-based approach to previous studies, drawn from primary sources such as industry almanacs, studio histories and autobiographical accounts from key practitioners, in order to chart the evolution of Japan's animation industry as a whole, from its genesis with a handful of pioneering solo operators in 1917 to the formulation of anime as a global brand.

The evolution is charted in relation to changing commercial trends, industrial practices, technological developments, historical contexts and shifting audience demographics, all of which, as Clements rightly argues, have had their combined impact on style and content: for example, the introduction of cellulose for cel-animation, and sound, colour and computer graphics technologies; the continuing legacy of low-budget TV animation's corner-cutting practices as established by Tezuka in the 1960s; and the effects of the emergence of home-viewing media on both domestic and international patterns of distribution and fan culture.

The establishment of the studio Toei Animation in 1956, with the aim of creating high-quality theatrical works that could be sold internationally, is generally held as the beginning of what might be termed Japan's animation 'industry'. However, it is the half-century history prior to this that yields the most revelations – a hidden history in that so many of these works are lost.

Early innovators soon realised that the man-hours necessary for creating their films could not be justified by their limited possibilities for commercial exploitation, and thus advertising or government-funded educational works such as *Oral Hygiene* (1923) and *The Physiology of Plants* (1924) predominated over narrative shorts in its first decade. The fascinating account of the later activities of Toho's 'shadow staff', who created the instructional *Principles of Bombardment* (1940-41) films for pilots preparing for the attack on Pearl Harbor, highlights just how thoroughly Clements has delved through local-language sources in constructing this riveting narrative of Japanese animation's quite literal impact on the world. **S**

PAN'S LABYRINTH

By Mar Diestro-Dópido, BFI Palgrave Macmillan, BFI Film Classics, 104pp, £10.99, ISBN 9781844576418

Reviewed by Kim Newman

In 'The Folk Song Army', Tom Lehrer summed up "the war against Franco" with "though he may have won all the battles, we had all the good songs". Mar Diestro-Dópido's BFI Classics book on Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* (*El laberinto del fauno*) extends this theory to cinema. In recent years, the liminal zone between the long-established BFI Film Classics and BFI Modern Classics lines has evaporated, which means a movie from 2006 now qualifies for classic status. Diestro-Dópido makes an excellent case for her subject being a very good film, but isn't in a position to address the implication of the packaging that it's a canonical classic – it really is too early to tell, though it is plainly a significant film from an important creator.

Del Toro has reused, if not developed, images, themes and ideas from this personal film in subsequent more obviously commercial projects such as *Hellboy II: The Golden Army* (which he wrote and directed) and the remake of *Don't Be Afraid of the Dark* (which he wrote and produced). Such was the surprising box-office (and Oscar) success of this Spanish-language arthouse historical/horror hybrid that the second *Hellboy* film was billed on the poster as "from the director of *Pan's Labyrinth*". However, for all its fine qualities, the only influence *Pan's Labyrinth* seems to have had outside of del Toro's subsequent work and profile is in popularising the use of CGI rather than practical blood-squibs for depicting bullet hits – one of the few elements

It's perhaps the mark of a genuine classic in the making that 'Pan's Labyrinth' can stand up to this sort of superior close analysis



Journey into fear: *Pan's Labyrinth*

of the film that sounds a false note eight years on.

Diestro-Dópido deftly dissects the two strands of del Toro's filmography – English-language genre films (*Mimic*, *Blade II*, *Hellboy*) and Spanish-language genre-informed fables of childhood, horror and political oppression (*Pan's Labyrinth* follows *The Devil's Backbone*, a ghost story also set in the Spanish Civil War). *Cronos*, his bilingual debut feature, straddles both modes, and his movies work best when his concerns bleed into each other on a thematic and technical level. The book locates the film in Spanish history and cinema, citing earlier films about children, the Civil War (though, as Diestro-Dópido points out, *Pan's Labyrinth* isn't set during the Civil War but at a specific point in 1944 during the ironically labelled 'peace years') and magic (notably Victor Erice's *The Spirit of the Beehive* / *El espíritu de la colmena*, 1973, and Carlos Saura's *Raise Ravens/Cría Cuervos*, 1976). This reading emphasises how grounded del Toro's fantastical tale is historically and geographically, showing that he has worked as hard on the detail of the real world as on the fantastical secondary realm that tempts and tests young heroine Ofelia (Ivana Baquero, who looks very like Ana Torrent, young star of Erice's and Saura's films).

Of course, *The Wizard of Oz* and *Alice in Wonderland* are evoked as touchstones for the story of a girl who ventures into a magical, yet dangerous otherworld that mirrors her everyday reality, though *Peter Pan* is skipped past – perhaps because Diestro-Dópido goes along with del Toro in not being comfortable with the English title, stressing that Pan and the faun are different creatures. Also included in the pre-history of *Pan's Labyrinth* are the British ghost-story writers Algernon Blackwood and Arthur Machen, which shows del Toro to be a connoisseur of fantastic literature beyond the obvious. Written before *Pacific Rim* outed del Toro as a devotee of the Japanese *kaiju eiga* tradition, the book doesn't cite another possible model for the film – Honda Ishirō's *All Monsters Attack!* (AKA *Godzilla's Revenge*, 1969), in which a neglected, monster-loving small boy wishes himself to Monster Island, where he is involved in a series of perils and adventures that reflect the struggles and challenges of his everyday life.

The book includes the expected production details and history, plus a useful interview with del Toro (who, unlike a number of filmmakers, is always interested in discussing and probing his own work), but the meat of it is an analysis of the film itself, teasing out the minutiae of almost every scene (illustrated by frame captures – the match of the film's Pale Man chomping a fairy's head off to Goya's illustration of Saturn devouring his son is startling) and character. Fully-engaged, detail-oriented criticism like this is rare outside of this series of books and it's perhaps the mark of a genuine classic in the making that a film can stand up to this sort of close analysis; it's also the mark of a superior entry in the BFI Film Classics series that Diestro-Dópido's approach, probing for an accumulation of tiny readings that build into a grand pattern, illuminates rather than exsanguinates the subject on the table. **S**

HIP HOP ON FILM

Performance, Culture, Urban Space and Genre Transformation in the 1980s

By Kimberley Monteyne, University Press of Mississippi, \$60, 277pp, ISBN 9781617039225

Reviewed by Dylan Cave

What happened to the American musical in the 1980s? It may have morphed, as some claim, into the pop-soundtrack-heavy Brat Pack movies, but no one was singing anymore. Even *Footloose*, *Flashdance* and *Dirty Dancing* were strictly dance only. Where did the classic American musical go? One answer, argued by Kimberley Monteyne in her excellent book *Hip Hop on Film*, is that the genre went underground.

Hip-hop has featured in movies for more than 30 years now, driving films such as *Do the Right Thing*, *Boyz N the Hood*, *8 Mile* and countless others, but Monteyne is drawn to a very specific cycle of films. Starting with Charlie Ahearn's drama-doc *Wild Style* (1983), she focuses on a handful of movies that surfaced with the breakdance craze of the mid-1980s. It's a niche group; only *Wild Style* and perhaps *Beat Street* (1984) are generally considered noteworthy, while the rest were mostly forgotten after their theatrical runs (though, apparently, 1984's *Breakin'* had better box office than that year's *The Terminator*).



Keeping it real: *Wild Style*

But Monteyne asserts that the cycle is a crucial missing gap in the history of urban African-American cinema, more progressive than both the blaxploitation films that preceded them and the 1990s 'New Black Cinema' that followed.

Monteyne astutely broadens the discussion out from the hip hop movies into a wider consideration of 1980s movies, arguing that they offered a radically alternative image of youth culture. With scene after scene of black and Puerto Rican kids writing, breakdancing or making music, urban youth culture is depicted as positive and uniquely artistic. In contrast to the middle class teens of, say, John Hughes movies, the street breakers and rappers don't just consume pop culture, they are out there creating it. Monteyne also draws comparisons with classic Hollywood musicals, connecting the narrative tropes of *Beat Street* and *Wild Style* to old Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire movies. She illustrates how the structures of the earlier films are re-worked in the hip-hop musicals, placing African-American and Latino teenagers at the centre of their cinematic worlds.

The prose is intelligent, well researched (the pages on the riots that followed NYC screenings of *Krush Groove* are fascinating) and always eloquent. On the atrocious Razzie-nominated *Body Rock* (1984), for example, Monteyne accurately describes the film's cynical, exploitative nature, the irony in its preppy cast disdaining rappers who don't 'keep it real', and the Vanilla Ice-style play-acting of former soap star Lorenzo Lamas as 'Chilly D'. Maybe, just once, she could borrow a well worn phrase from the hip-hop lexicon: the movie is *wack*. S

HOLOCAUST INTERSECTIONS

Genocide and Visual Culture at the New Millennium

Edited by Axel Bangert, Robert S.C. Gordon and Libby Saxton, Legenda, 240pp, £45, ISBN 9781907975028

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

The 'millennium' of this book's title stands for the reconstitution of Europe since the end of the Cold War – one effect of which has been an enhanced knowledge of the Holocaust based on archives in the former Eastern Bloc – and for the rise of digital media during the same period. The two together have led to what Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider have described as the "cosmopolitanisation of memories", prompting the editors to ask the question: to whom does the memory of the Holocaust belong? At the same time, the book's contributors are concerned with the older question of how suffering and testimony are adequately conveyed.

Claude Lanzmann's critique of the use of archive footage, embodied in *Shoah* (1985) and given voice elsewhere, towers over the debate – no matter how casually Lanzmann's strictures have been ignored subsequently – and most of the contributors engage with it, explicitly or otherwise. Barry Langford rejects it altogether, immersing himself in the "barrage of representation", attempting to justify "the employment of horror-film motifs" and defending Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) as "a high-modernist work of considerable seriousness", a case also made at chapter length by Ferzina Banaji.

Part of Lanzmann's argument, taken up by Piotr Cieplak and Emma Wilson, was against the

exploitation of images of particular instances of suffering to express 'generalities'. Cieplak and Wilson use as their main example *Iseta: Behind the Roadblock* (2008), a documentary about Nick Hughes, the BBC cameraman who captured the only known footage of killing during the mass slaughter in Rwanda. Hughes's images of unknown victims – which have been used to represent the deaths of thousands of others, just as Lanzmann warned – took on new meanings when shown

Claude Lanzmann was against the exploitation of archive images of particular instances of suffering to express 'generalities'

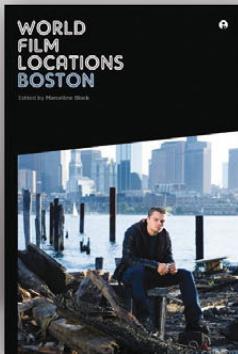
to Rwandan witnesses, leading Cieplak and Wilson to conclude that "capture of the images is critical and at the same time it is not enough".

Annette Hamilton's chapter on Rithy Panh's films about the Khmer Rouge, of whose crimes there is little visual record either in photography or film, takes a similarly scrupulous approach towards the use of re-enacted scenes involving the original participants. As she notes of *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* (2003), Panh leaves the viewer to "imagine that what is being shown are spontaneous responses by the film's subjects", despite their having been constructed "to achieve consonance with the director's viewpoint". The widespread acclaim for *The Act of Killing* (2012), which presents similar problems, makes this an unusually timely book. S



Inglourious Basterds: 'a high modernist work of considerable seriousness'

Read



WORLD FILM LOCATIONS: BOSTON

Edited by Marcelline Block, Intellect Books, paperback, illustrated, 128pp, £15.50, ISBN 9781783201983
Numerous American classics, blockbusters, romantic comedies and legal thrillers were filmed on location in Boston's streets and back lots. *World Film Locations: Boston* looks in depth at a select group of 46 films, including *Love Story*, *Good Will Hunting*, *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* and *The Social Network*, presented at the intersection of critical analysis and stunning visual critique. Featuring articles by leading contemporary film critics and scholars, this book is a multimedia resource that will find a welcome audience in movie lovers in Beantown and beyond.

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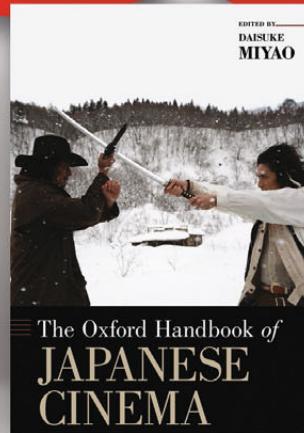


REFRAMING REALITY

The Aesthetics of the Surrealist Object in French and Czech Cinema

By Alison Frank, Intellect Books, paperback, illustrated, £20, ISBN 9781841507125
The surrealist object is an everyday item that takes on multiple associations by provoking the viewer's imagination. It also poses a specific challenge for filmmakers who seek to apply surrealist ideas and approaches when making feature-length narrative films. In *Reframing Reality*, Alison Frank looks specifically at French and Czech films, including *Un chien Andalou* by Luis Buñuel, and the work of Czech animator Jan Švankmajer. Frank also explores Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Amélie* in order to offer a new take on surrealist film.

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THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF JAPANESE CINEMA

Edited by Daisuke Miyao, Oxford University Press, hardback, illustrated, 496pp, £100, ISBN 9780199731664

The Oxford Handbook of Japanese Cinema provides a multifaceted single-volume account of Japanese cinema. It addresses productive debates about what Japanese cinema is and where it is currently at, and looks at the state of Japanese cinema studies during a period of so-called crisis that has seen the joint challenges of globalisation and film digitisation.

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IMPURE CINEMA

Intermedial and Intercultural Approaches to Film

Edited by Lúcia Nagib and Anne Jerslev, I.B. Tauris, paperback, 336pp, £17.99, ISBN 9781780765112

In contemporary progressive film criticism, ideas of purity, essence and origin have been superseded by favourable approaches to 'hybridisation', 'transnationalism', 'multiculturalism' and cross-fertilisations of all sorts.

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FAN PHENOMENA: BATMAN

Edited by Liam Burke, Intellect Books, paperback, illustrated, 182pp, £15.50, ISBN 9781783200177

Fan Phenomena: Batman explores the worldwide devotion to the Dark Knight, from his inauspicious beginnings on the comic-book page to the cult television series of the 1960s and the critically acclaimed films and video games of today. Packed with interviews from all corners of the fan spectrum – including DC Comics president Paul Levitz, film producer Michael E. Uslan, as well as film reviewers, academics, movie buffs, comic-store clerks and costume-clad convention attendees – this book is sure to be a bestseller in Gotham City and beyond.

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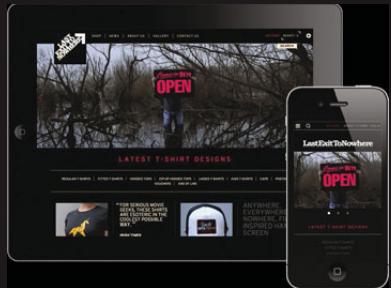
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IN PRAISE OF MULLIGAN

How refreshing to read Nick Pinkerton's praise for Robert Mulligan in his review of the DVD release of *The Other* (S&S, Home Cinema, March). Mulligan always seemed to me to be a worthy member of a great humanist tradition in Hollywood cinema, and the films he made in partnership with producer Alan Pakula (and not just *To Kill a Mockingbird*) were among the cinematic highlights for me of the 1960s. As *The Other* demonstrates also, he made gems in later decades; and as well as being a great director of children, Mulligan secured performances from stars such as Steve McQueen, Natalie Wood, Robert Redford, Anthony Perkins and Tony Curtis that rank among their best work for the screen. If your magazine were ever to run a series on overlooked and/or underrated directors of American cinema, one of the first names that would spring to my mind would be Mulligan.

Neil Sinyard University of Hull

LOVE BYTES

The latest unclassifiable film from Spike Jonze has defeated your 'Anatomy of a Movie' segment on *Her* (S&S, March). Surely the film most closely resembles *SimOne*, Andrew Niccol's exploration of a sultry-voiced AI romance? Or you could include *Barbarella*, in which Jane Fonda's sexual voyager only has one genuine friendship, with the ship's gay male on-board computer!

Christopher Fowler London

LIFE AFTER PRESSURE

It was extremely gratifying to read Ashley Clark's analysis of the ending of *Pressure* (Endings, S&S, December 2013) and to discover the extent to which the film still stands up after all these years.

Ashley is right to lament that Horace Ove was "unable to develop a proper career as a feature filmmaker", but there are a couple of interesting postscripts to the story. After *Pressure* successfully opened, Horace and I were asked by John Goldstone, producer of the Monty Python films, if we had any other ideas. As it happened, I had been in Jamaica in 1973 and I came up with the story of a modern-day Rastafarian producer who sets Jamaica alight, both with his message and his music.

John packed us off to Kingston where we had a number of extraordinary adventures, eventually producing a screenplay called *Shashamane*. It was agreed that the only star capable of playing the lead would be Bob Marley. Yet, despite two extremely positive meetings with Don Taylor, Bob's manager, nothing came of it (perhaps because Don and Bob fell out; perhaps because Bob became ill) and the project died.

There was, however, to be a further *Pressure* postscript when I was invited to join the BFI's Production Board Committee, which had originally financed it. Menelik Shabazz's *Burning an Illusion* came in as a simple, five-page monologue. However, I became convinced that it contained all the elements of a full-length film.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

INTOLERABLE CRUELTY



In many ways I acknowledge that *12 Years a Slave* (above) is quite brilliant. It is carefully crafted and even quite beautiful at times, but I have serious reservations about the approach. Steve McQueen always seems to major in unrelenting harshness and only minors in humanity. This is the wrong way round because it diminishes the real emotional power and meaning of a story.

There is always the danger of a film's falling into being a rather superficial catalogue of horrors, however realistic and non-sentimental. After the first few lashes, kickings, beatings and hangings, one wants to shout, "Have mercy. I've got the point. I know about man's inhumanity to man."

McQueen is a far better filmmaker than Mel Gibson, of course, but his fundamental error is much the same as that of Gibson in the latter's dreadful flesh-flaying epic, *The Passion of the Christ*. It is mistaken to think that if an audience is spared the representation

of any abomination to its fullest and most distressing extent, that its understanding and sorrow will necessarily be less than they should be. Quite the opposite in fact is true: the 'take no prisoners' philosophy leads us to turn away in horror rather than towards an imaginative participation in the real pain of the victim. At most one just feels sorry for them.

The representation of torture should never itself be painful. It is both an aesthetic and moral error. One need not see every drop of blood to see that something is bloody nor witness every inch of torn flesh to see that something is traumatic. Nor do we need to hear every scream to recognise inhumanity. I feel like stressing this to filmmakers until I'm hoarse – focus on the human reaction rather than the nastiness if one seeks maximum emotional involvement rather than mere relief when it comes to an end. So, is the film good? Yes, but it could and should have been far finer.

Paul Hill Louth

I went to see Menelik and began helping him to shape the eventual screenplay. Though I was not involved in the production, I remain delighted to have played a small part in its genesis.

My last effort in this area was in the 1980s with a Caryl Phillips screenplay about 18th-century prizefighters; sadly, again coming to nought. There are many great stories in the black community. With the success of *12 Years a Slave*, perhaps more of them will come to be told.

Robert Buckler producer, *Pressure*

SHOOTING THE PASTA

Mark Cousins's 'Expanding the frame' (Dispatches, January, S&S) was typically thought-provoking. But in all the discussion of *Blue Is the Warmest Colour* over the last year, I'm surprised, if not shocked, no one has mentioned the pasta thing.

Yes, pasta. The male gaze is one thing, but director Kechiche's unwavering pasta gaze is another. Almost as much screen time is given to various characters shovelling pasta into their mouths in this picture as the notorious sex scenes.

I have no problems with most fetishes portrayed on screen, but Kechiche's pasta fetish pushes my limits. I'm sorry. Nobody looks good shovelling pasta into their mouths, be it in extreme close-up or medium shots, both of which are featured for untold minutes in the film.

In any event, I'm looking forward to the Blu-ray, with 'Pasta Scene Delete' option, which will nicely cut the three-hour film to a more palatable two.

Ben Murray Canada

Additions and corrections

March p.81 *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, Certificate 15, 99m 39s, 8,968 ft +8 frames p.86 *Nymphomania Volume 1*, Certificate 18, 117m 26s, 10,569 ft +0 frames; p.87 *Nymphomania Volume 2*, Certificate 18, 123m 43s, 11,134 ft +8 frames

February p.64 *American Hustle* USA 2013, ©White Dog Productions LLC, Robert De Niro is uncredited; p.80 *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug*, USA/New Zealand 2013, ©Warner Bros Entertainment Inc and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures Inc (US, Canada & New Line foreign territories), ©Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures Inc and Warner Bros Entertainment Inc (all other territories) p.86 *Moshi Monsters: The Movie*, Certificate U, 81m 0s, 7,290 ft +0 frames; p.89 *The Patrol*, Certificate 15, 82m 46s, 7,449 ft +0 frames

January p.66 *Her* USA/China 2013, ©Untitled Rick Howard Company LLC, Produced with the assistance of China Film Co-production Corporation and Gung-Ho Films

AFTER HOURS



The circularity in Martin Scorsese's *After Hours* leaves its protagonist trapped after breaking free, and its director ready for a new beginning

By Danny Leigh

To discuss the ending of Martin Scorsese's deathlessly funny *After Hours* (1985), we have to go back to the beginning. There, the camera lunges across a drab 80s office to the desk of Paul Hackett, a word processor when such a thing was almost a career, played with fidgety dour by Griffin Dunne. Moments later, he squeezes through the ornate gates of his employers, out into a Manhattan sunset.

By the end of the night ahead, he will be soaked, half-scalped and in fear for his life, a date downtown transformed into a slapstick *Inferno*, a bad-luck odyssey through bohemian SoHo. Finally, disguised as a papier mâché sculpture while a mob bays for his blood, he is stolen by burglars. Their van careers away – before dawn arrives and a screeching right-turn sees him flung on to the street. He is, we see, outside his office. The celestial gates reopen and, caked in debris, he returns to his desk. "Good Morning, Paul," offers his computer screen.

Of course! Tonally it's flawless, the perfect punchline to a grand black joke, an indifferent cosmos dumping its plaything back where it found him. Kafka is the usual reference point, but the ending could have come from Keaton, whose spiralling tales of Man versus World were always precisely engineered.

Yet the route to the ending of *After Hours* was bedlam, proof that even the most graceful creative decisions are born of flux. And to discuss it properly we must go back further still, to a downcast Scorsese learning that his treasured project *The Last Temptation Of Christ* had been cancelled a month before filming – and making *After Hours* just to lose himself in a job.

Such was his haste to start working that the shoot began without an agreed ending. All anyone knew was that it wouldn't be the one in Joseph Minion's script (in which Paul wandered into the streets to buy sculptress/saviour June ice cream). After long, kinetic nights on location, the first cut simply ended with Paul's statue in the burglars' van, eyes alive with terror.

It outraged those who saw it as only a bad ending can. Among the audience was Scorsese's mentor Michael Powell, for whom the decision to leave Paul to his fate was a nihilistic snigger too far. Powell insisted he must end up back at his desk. Scorsese pretended not to hear and sought counsel from peers including Brian De Palma and Steven Spielberg. In one possible finale, Paul escaped in a balloon; in another, June became a giant and Paul climbed into her womb, being reborn naked on 57th Street. That made it as far as a storyboard.

Powell, of course, had got it right. Some pitchy

Kafka is the usual reference point, but the ending could have come from one of Keaton's tales of Man versus World

realism had to keep ticking until the credits – and fate should have a decent sense of humour. Even though if you look for it you can see the join where Thelma Schoonmaker appended the new footage, as cinema it still feels seamless, circularity the natural state for a film filled with clocks and set on an island. (I can't have been the only one who thought of Paul as this year's New York story *Inside Llewyn Davis* ended where it started.)

But if Paul winds up trapped even after breaking free, there are worse things than going back to work – and not just for Scorsese, who used the film to channel his frustrations on *The Last Temptation of Christ*. For Powell too, 25 years after the professional wreckage of *Peeping Tom*, something surely sang to him about the notion of a second chance, a dusted-off return to business.

Often seen as a mere stopgap, by the end *After Hours* looks like a deeply personal moment for two filmmakers at once. Yet the last word is purely Scorsese's – a lurch away from the desk to mirror the very first shot, and a mad unbroken reel around the office, as if the film's deranged energy won't quite go back in the bottle.

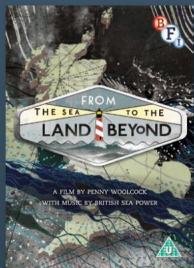
For Scorsese, *After Hours* itself feels like an ending, a full stop on the first half of a career defined by lean portraits of male paranoia. From here the films would grow ever splashier, sprawlier.

Starker still would be the change in New York. In 1985, a stray yuppie might plausibly find themselves alone in darkened SoHo, fearful of the freaks among the zigzag fire escapes. Soon though, the bankers would outnumber the artists, and the weirdos were the ones who had to flee. *Après Paul Hackett, le déluge.* ☀

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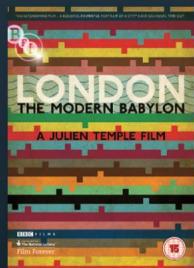
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